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KAPPA PUBLICATION

THE WHOLE
ABOUT Mr. Anders
DOES Cody Rhodes
HAVE EYES FOR Maryse?

A "Future Legend" With Realistic Goals

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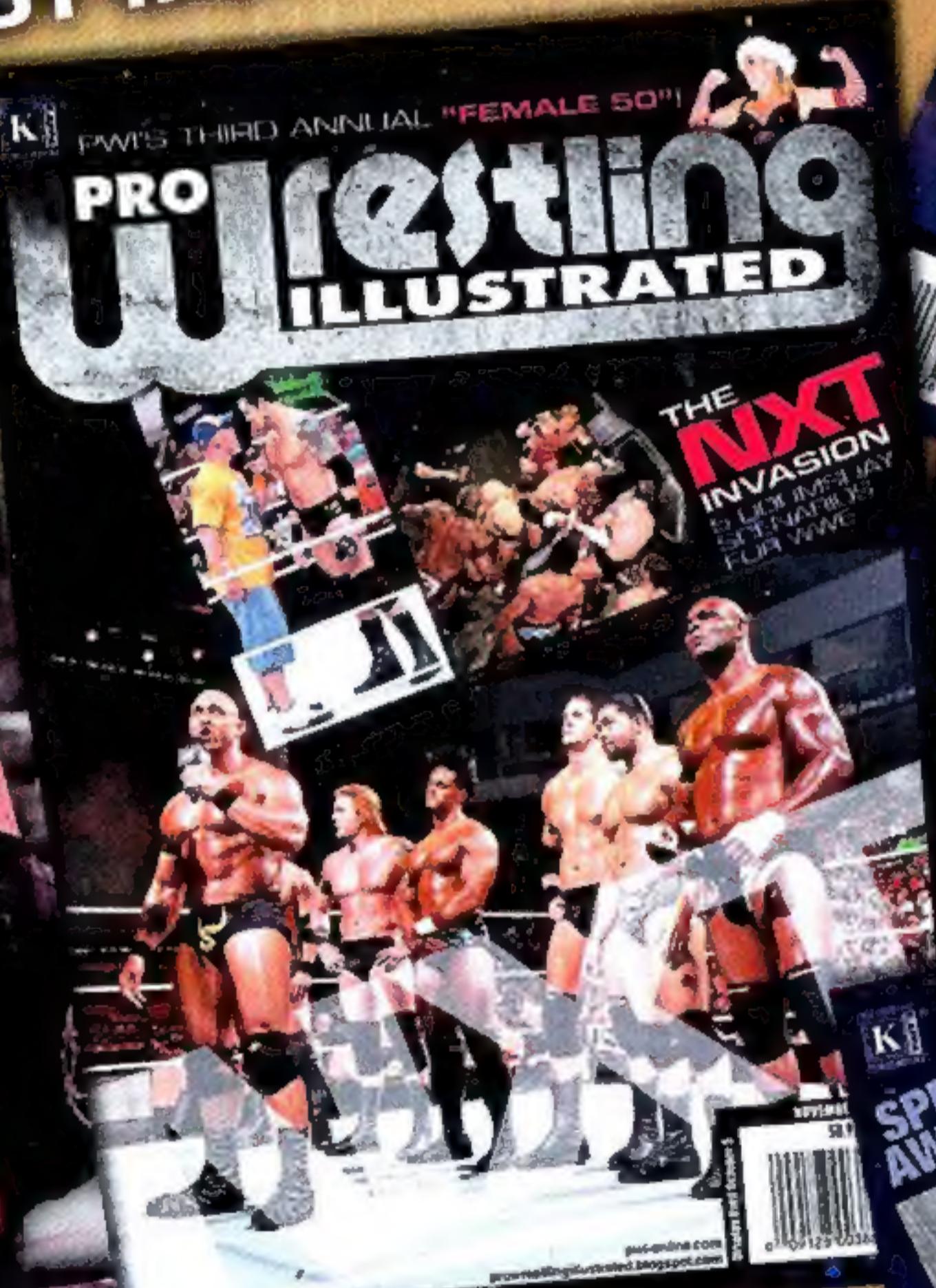
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COLLECTOR'S EDITION!

WRESTLING ANNUAL

THE YEAR IN REVIEW
A MONTH-BY-MONTH RECAP

OUR 2010 STATE OF THE GAME REPORT
PRO
Wrestling
ILLUSTRATED

THE BELL
TOLLS FOR
HBK
Team Coverage Of
WrestleMania '26



COVER-ING
THE BEST OF 2010

THE TOP NEWS STORIES + RINGSIDE PHOTOS
WINNERS & LOSERS + MEMORABLE QUOTES

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EDIT ONE

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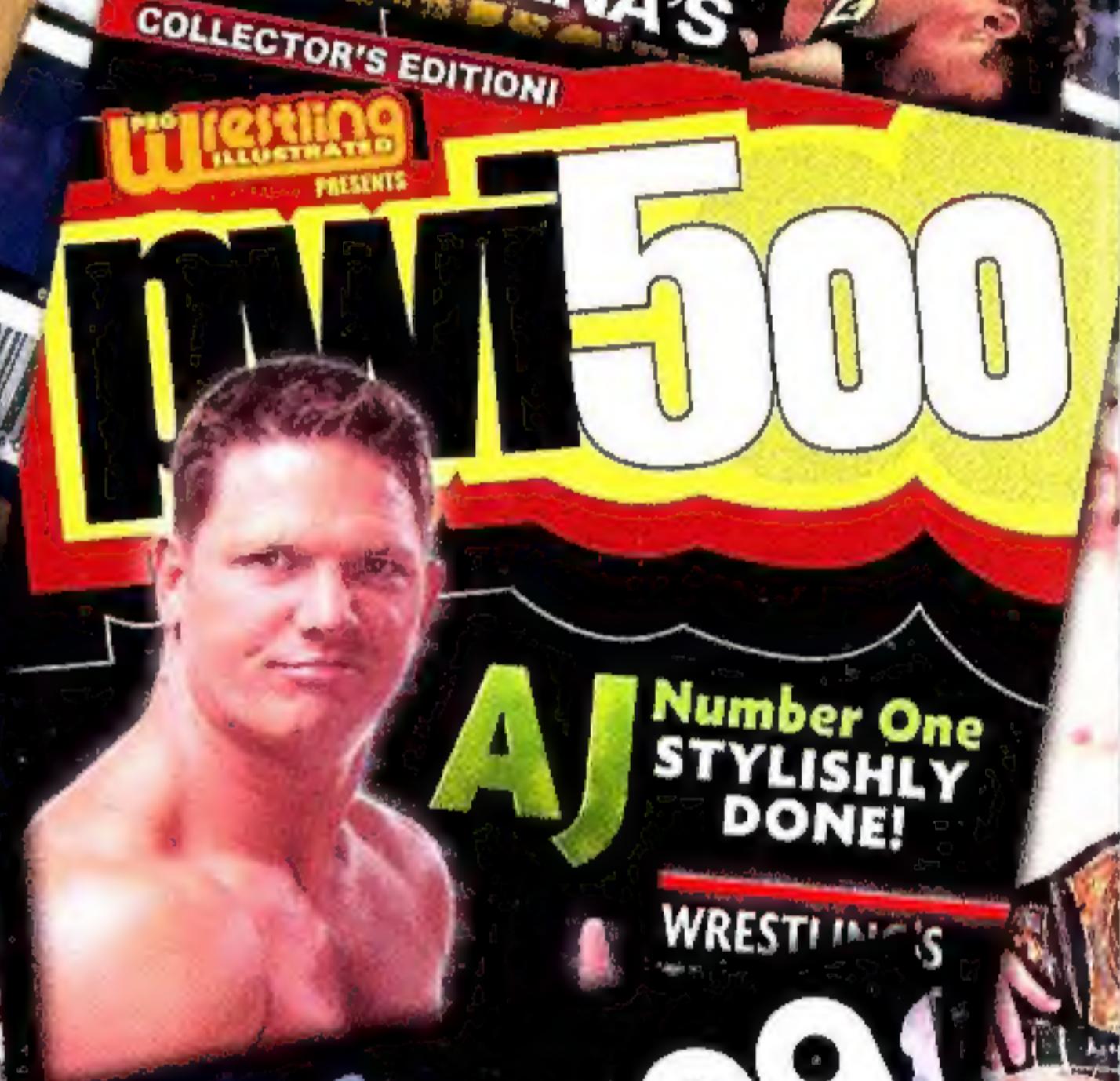
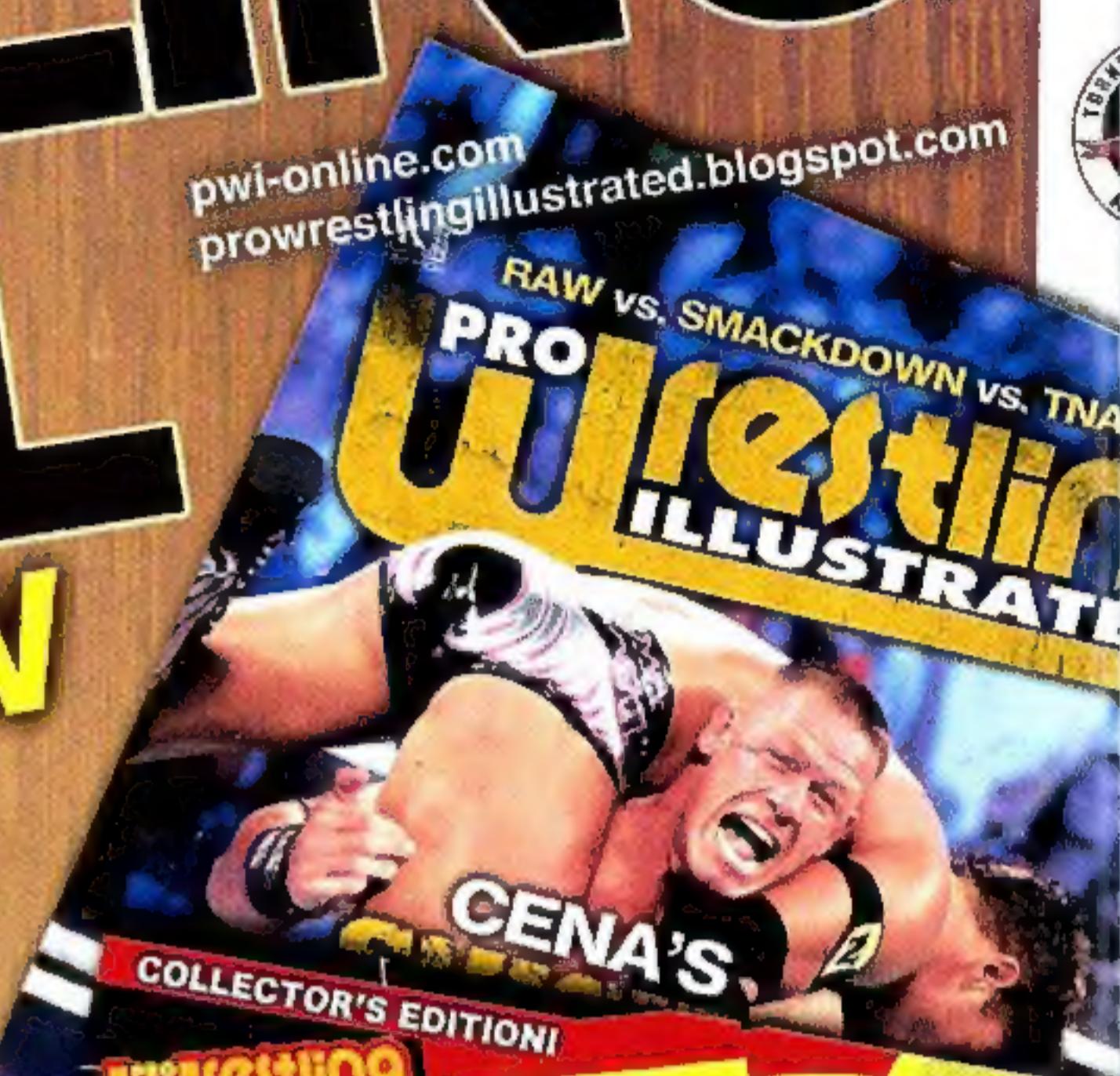
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EDITOR'S NOTE

THEY SAY TIME flies when you're having fun. Judging by how quickly 2010 seemed to pass, last year must have been a ball for fans. From an editorial point of view, there was certainly plenty for us to sink our teeth into.

In WWE, we saw the build-up and climax of wrestling's most significant storyline in years with The Nexus. We also witnessed the departure and return of two wrestling legends—Shawn Michaels (outgoing) and Bret Hart (incoming).

But it wasn't all about the proven vets in WWE last year. 2010 also proved to be the year for some of WWE's younger talent to shine.

Indeed, the absences of Michaels, Triple-H, The Undertaker, Chris Jericho, and Batista for varying lengths of time may have foreshadowed gloom and doom, but the rise of The Miz, Sheamus, John Morrison, and others showed that WWE's 2009 youth movement is paying off, as several new stars moved seamlessly into the company's upper-card in 2010.

WWE made watching its wrestlers a bit trickier in 2010, with *Smackdown* jumping from MyNetwork to Syfy, and *NXT* jumping from Syfy to wwe.com. Unfortunately for some, WWE wrestling over the free airwaves became a thing of the past.

TNA made a valiant, but failed, attempt at starting a ratings war with WWE by signing several big-name talents and jumping to Monday nights so that *Impact* could air head-to-head against *Raw*. In the end, the showdown wasn't competitive at all, but quite a few fans got a charge out of seeing whom TNA would bring in next... and quite a few also delighted in Hulk Hogan and Erich Bischoff's failure to boost *Impact*'s ratings.

Beyond the mat, WWE attempted to defend its place in pop culture during Linda McMahon's unsuccessful Senate bid, with several high-profile marketing campaigns that showcased its virtues.

These were all exciting developments that only few saw coming, and, from

where I sat, they made 2010 much more interesting than most post-Y2K years.

On the flip side, 2010 was the same as any other year in some ways. Ring of Honor saw the exit of yet another heavyweight champion. In 2010, it was Tyler Black's turn to dip his toe in WWE waters, signing a developmental deal with the company and starting fresh as Seth Rollins in Florida Championship Wrestling in September. Black wasn't the only familiar face to part ways with ROH in 2010. Former two-time champion Austin Aries, an ROH fixture, severed ties with the promotion, and booker/promoter Adam Pearce was replaced by Hunter "Delirious" Johnston.

As expected, 2010 also saw its share of legal messes, deaths, and disappointments.

Jeff Hardy's drug possession/trafficking trial was continuously postponed throughout the year. The only development came in late-December when it was leaked that Hardy intended to plead guilty to at least some of the charges against him, raising all kinds of questions as to how much prison time—if any—the "Charismatic Enigma" would face. Jim Neidhart and indy wrestler Nick Gage ran afoul of the law and, if convicted, face jail sentences.

Elsewhere, WWE drew the hairy eyeball from the State of Connecticut, which decided to investigate the "independent contractor" status of its performers.

Jack Brisco, Gene Kiniski, Baron Mikel Scicluna, Hans Mortier, King Curtis Iaukea, and Edouard Carpentier, among others, died of natural causes this past year, while Luna Vachon, Trent Acid, and Lance Cade perished from accidental drug overdoses. Chris "Kanyon" Klucaritis and Tony "Ludwig Borga" Halme took their own lives.

Call the past year, fun, interesting, crazy—or whatever you want. It certainly wasn't boring, and as a fan and an editor, I can only hope that 2011 follows suit.

Frank Krewda
Editor-in-Chief

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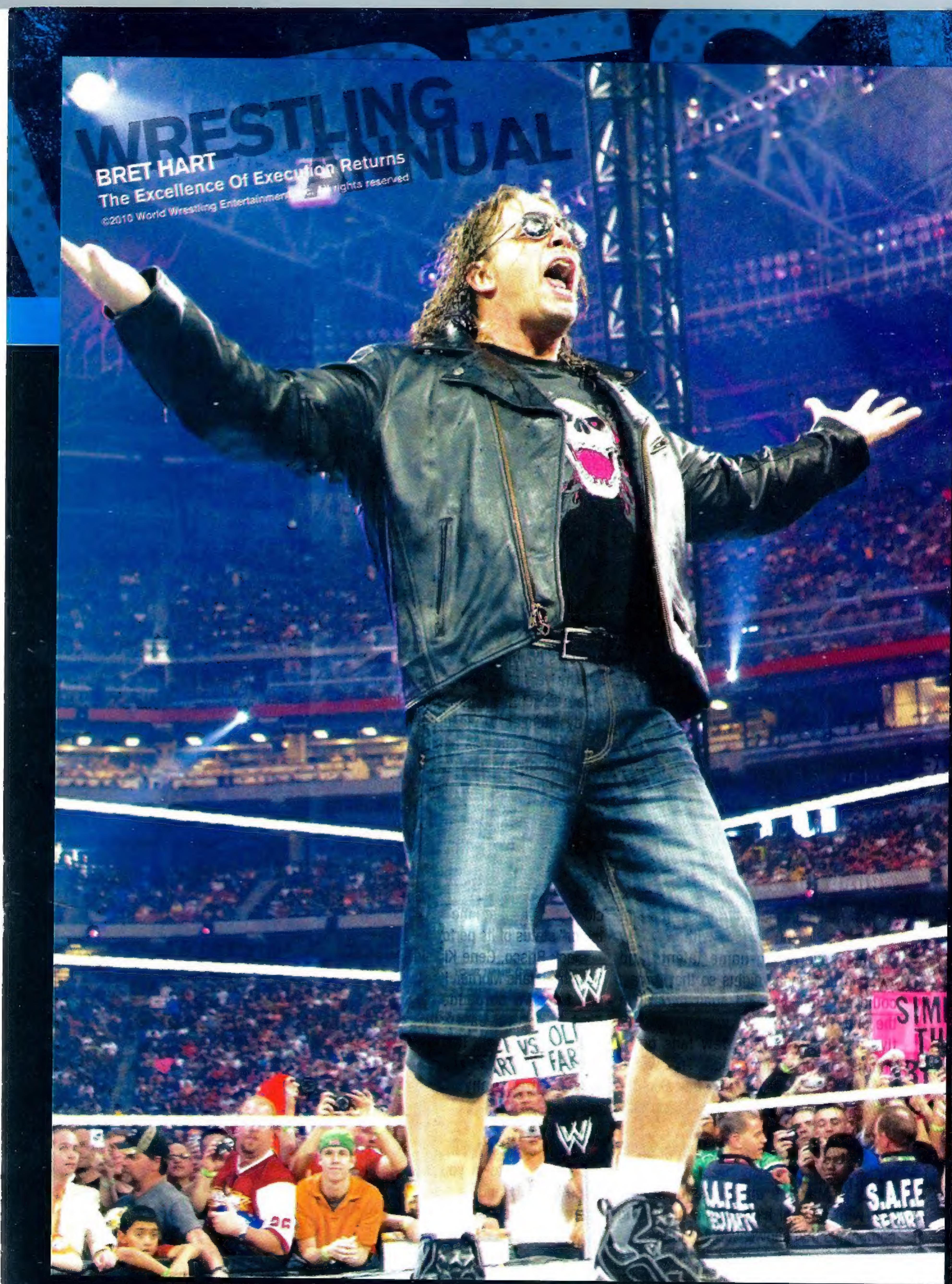
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JANUARY

COMPILED BY **Don Stradley**

A NEW DECADE was starting, but in the world of professional wrestling, the tone was being set by a group of oldsters. Time and again, the day's leading headline was about someone who'd been around at the beginning of the previous decade.

There was Bret Hart, who stepped into a WWE ring to address a new generation of fans, many of whom were not yet born when he was in his heyday.

Then there was Hulk Hogan, the most famous wrestler of all-time, joining TNA. Ric Flair also turned up in TNA, as did Scott Hall and Sean Waltman.

Shawn Michaels and Edge each made news, as Michaels' obsession with The Undertaker drove him to distraction, while Edge surprised us with his return at The Royal Rumble.

Other veterans to make headlines included Scott Steiner, who seemed to vanish from TNA; Hurricane Helms and Jeff Hardy, who still seem young but are both old enough to know better, added to their back catalog of odd behavior; and finally, there was Tony Halme, who made a different sort of headline.

But even as veterans seemed to dominate the news, the month belonged to young AJ Styles for beating Kurt Angle three times. As far as Styles was concerned, youth was served in January.

BRET HART RECONCILES WITH MICHAELS, NOT VINCE

Bret Hart always said hell would freeze over before we'd see "The Hitman" in a WWE ring again, but on January 4, at the Nutter Center in Dayton,

Ohio, Hart not only served as *Raw*'s guest host, he had long-awaited encounters with both Shawn Michaels and Vince McMahon Jr.

The meeting with Michaels came first. Hart entered the ring to a great response, and recounted the events surrounding the infamous Montreal Screw Job, where Michaels and McMahon conspired to remove the championship belt from Hart's waist during the 1997 Survivor Series pay-per-view. The "Heartbreak Kid" joined Hart in the ring and aired his own beefs with Hart, but added that he didn't want the two of them to be labeled forever by the Montreal incident. By the end of their segment, they shook hands and hugged. There was a sense that they had done as Hart had wished, and found some closure.

McMahon, though, wasn't quite as amenable. When he finally agreed to meet Hart in the ring, he went through the motions of apologizing, and even offered to induct Hart's father, the legendary Stu Hart, into the WWE Hall of Fame. But after encouraging the fans to cheer Hart, McMahon kicked Bret in the gut, sending the Canadian hero to his knees in agony.

As the long-awaited sequel to perhaps the most infamous moment in wrestling history, it was anti-climactic. Still, it was fascinating to see Hart back in WWE after so much time and acrimony.

TNA BEGINS NEW ERA

After weeks of anticipation, the Hulk Hogan era of TNA began on January 4 with a special three-hour live Monday night edition of *Impact*. It definitely lived

AFTER ENCOURAGING THE FANS TO CHEER HART, MCMAHON KICKED BRET IN THE GUT, SENDING THE CANADIAN HERO TO HIS KNEES IN AGONY.



A phenomenal champion

up to the hype, with many stars making surprise guest appearances, including Jeff Hardy, Ric Flair, The Nasty Boys, Scott Hall, Sean Waltman, Val Venis, Shannon Moore, Orlando Jordan, and even Eric Bischoff. The telecast drew an estimated 2.2 million viewers, a new record for TNA.

The evening included an X division Steel Asylum match; Bobby Lashley announcing his departure from wrestling; an appearance by Jeff Jarrett; a match that saw ODB beat Tara for the Knockouts title; Sting lurking in the rafters; and a main event pitting Kurt Angle against champion AJ Styles, won by Styles in his usual exciting manner.

One of the highlights of the evening was when Hogan's first speech as TNA's new leader was interrupted by Kevin Nash, Hall, and Waltman. Bischoff ran down to take Hogan's side, and warned the belligerent trio that things were different than they were when the five of them formed the nucleus of the New World Order in WCW a dozen years ago. Whether a recycled NWO (now called "The Band") had anything to offer TNA in 2010 was a question

ALTHOUGH HARDY WAS AWAITING TRIAL FOR HIS 2009 DRUG ARREST, WWE HAD NOT WRITTEN HIM OFF.

that wasn't answered on January 4, but these ghosts of wrestling's past showed they could still create some drama. The show ended with Nash, Hall, and Waltman attacking Mick Foley and laying him out.

Although the weeks following the explosive debut were uneven, the January 4 *Impact* was successful enough to inspire TNA to move *Impact* permanently to Monday nights.

JEFF HARDY'S FUTURE IN QUESTION

Jeff Hardy's appearance on *Impact* was memorable—he interrupted the Steel Asylum match and clobbered Homicide with a chair before climbing to the top of the cage and perching like a little Goth gargoyle—but his unexpected cameo also created a lot of confusion. WWE quickly removed Hardy from *Smackdown*'s opening video montage.

Although Hardy was awaiting trial for his 2009 drug arrest, WWE had not written him off. He was still a big name, and once his legal problems were over, there were plans for him to continue his feud with CM Punk. In fact, Punk continued to speak ill of Hardy on the following week's *Smackdown*, which irritated Hardy because he was not around to defend himself.

As is often the case with Hardy, there



New company, new enigma for fans

WRESTLING

ANNUAL

SEAN WALTMAN VS. JAMES STORM

TNA Genesis, January 17, 2010

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



**THE FORMER
WWE STAR
KNOWN AS
LUDVIG BORGA
HAD BEEN
STRUGGLING
WITH PERSONAL
PROBLEMS AND
DETERIORATING
HEALTH,
LARGELY DUE TO
A LONGTIME
DEPENDENCY
ON DRUGS AND
ALCOHOL.**

Victim of suicide at age 47



TONY (LUDVIG BORGA) HALME FOUND DEAD

On January 10, 47-year-old Tony Halme was discovered dead in his

Helsinki apartment. The former WWE star known as Ludvig Borga had been struggling with personal problems and deteriorating health, largely due to a longtime dependency on drugs and alcohol. Shortly before his death he told a Finnish reporter that he was also suffering from profound memory loss. His death was deemed a suicide by self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Halme first gained notice on the TV show *Gladiaattorit*, the Finnish version of *American Gladiators*. Under the tutelage of wrestling great Verne Gagne, Halme turned pro in 1990. After strong stints in the UWF and New Japan, Halme made his WWE debut in 1993. He found almost instant success as an angry foreign star feuding with the "All-American," Lex Luger, and even appeared at number 143 in the "PWI 500" that year. He wasn't an easy fit in the WWE

was an aura of mystery surrounding his appearance. Had he signed a contract with TNA, or was it just a one-time stunt? Was he trying to send a message to WWE, or was this just another incident of Jeff being Jeff? By appearing in TNA, he was jeopardizing his future with WWE, the group that pays more money and plays to bigger houses. Was he finally at a point where WWE-sized wrestling stardom no longer mattered?

Eventually there was word that Hardy was interested in TNA because the company had fewer travel demands, which was appealing to Hardy at this time in his life. Still, he didn't appear on TNA shows for the remainder of the month and there were no official announcements, the closest being Hardy's tease on Twitter that he and Shannon Moore would be returning to TNA as a tag team called HeavensDemons.

locker room, though. Halme reportedly had a Nazi Germany SS tattoo on his leg, which WWE made sure to cover up when he wrestled. When an ankle injury sidelined him, he found he was written out of future WWE storylines. From there, Halme dabbled in mixed martial arts and campaigned as a heavyweight boxer, with mediocre results.

Halme found greater success in Finnish politics. Like another wrestler-turned-politician, Jesse Ventura, Halme was known as an outspoken "character," and had maintained a kind of minor celebrity in Finland by recording an album, acting in movies, and authoring books. Still, pundits were shocked when Halme was elected to Finnish Parliament in 2003. Halme represented the relatively new True Finns Party, an anti-capitalist group. Although Halme wanted his victory to give hope to poor people, some political analysts thought it marked a dangerous turn to a racist, right-wing feeling in Finland.

MIKE TYSON RETURNS TO RAW

For many fans, Mike Tyson's 1998 appearance on *Raw* was the true beginning of the Attitude Era, if only because his altercation with Steve Austin created a *SportsCenter* moment that may have awakened older fans to the feisty new version of WWE. Back then, Tyson was at the height of his fame as boxing's ultimate bad boy, and was a big part of the buildup for WrestleMania 15, an event that saw Austin take the championship from Shawn Michaels. Tyson, installed as special referee, had aligned himself with D-X, but during the match revealed he was wearing a Stone Cold T-shirt.

When Tyson returned to guest host *Raw* on January 11 at the Target Center in Minneapolis, he was no longer perceived as such a monster, and the Attitude Era was a thing of the past. Still, he was a strong presence as guest host. A long-time wrestling buff, Tyson was in good form, trading some verbal taunts with Sheamus, terrorizing Hornswoggle, and teaming with Chris Jericho to take on D-X in the evening's main event.

Tyson looked good as he locked up

with Michaels and Triple-H. But in a switch from 12 years earlier, Tyson removed his shirt to reveal that he was wearing a D-X shirt underneath. Once Jericho realized he'd been bamboozled, Tyson nailed him with a terrific punch to the jaw.

After D-X scored the pin, there was a lengthy celebration in the ring, with one of Tyson's children joining the fun. After the four commandeered various corners of the ring and gave the D-X gesture to the fans, they then lined up over the fallen Jericho for the traditional D-X post-victory celebration of crotch chops and muscle poses. Tyson, whose life has been a series of peaks and valleys, seemed to be enjoying himself.

AWSOME KONG ATTACKS BUBBA THE LOVE SPONGE

Loudmouth radio personality Bubba the Love Sponge was the victim of a backstage beatdown at the hands of TNA Knockout Awesome Kong. Bubba, who had been brought into TNA through his friendship with Hulk Hogan, had made snide comments about Haiti just days after the island nation's capital had been devastated by an earthquake. Kong, who'd been active in raising funds for a Haiti relief project, screamed "This is for Haiti!" as she nailed Bubba with several sucker punches.

The altercation, which took place during the January 18 taping of *Impact*, resulted in Kong being sent home. Things were somewhat smoothed over after Kong met with management, but when she refused to take part in TNA's U.K. tour, she was slapped with a suspension that lasted nearly a month. Bubba tried to take the high road and requested she not be fired. He also made an apology of sorts on Twitter, although he and Hogan used Bubba's radio show to mock Kong and joke about the incident.

Some suggested that Kong's rage stemmed partially from an ongoing financial dispute with TNA. Others wanted to tie in Kong's behavior as part of the tension between longtime TNA stars and the newcomers associated with Hogan. But Kong maintained that no



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He's still got it

one knew the true story, and filmed a strange video clip of herself standing in front of a statue of Abraham Lincoln, saying that slavery wasn't over. Her best comment, though, was on her own Twitter account shortly after the incident took place. It read, "Kongfucious says: Sometimes you must feed someone a fist to make them eat their own words."

CM PUNK SAVES SOULS

No longer a champion, CM Punk turned into a sort of straight-edge evangelist, "saving" fans and inducting them into his inner circle. But his mission was two-fold, for he was not merely creating a flock to help spread his word; he was also assembling a dangerous posse. The enormous Luke Gallows, who shaved his head and swore his allegiance to the straight-edge lifestyle, conveniently turned out to be a wrestler, and teamed up with Punk to win a four-way tag match on the January 15 *Smackdown*, beating The Hart Dynasty, Cryme Tyme, and Khali and Matt Hardy. Prior to that, Gallows was ringside to assist Punk in beating Batista for a slot at the upcoming Elimination Chamber match.

Later in the month, Punk initiated Serena into the fold, sheering her long locks and saving her in the process. The final *Smackdown* of January saw

ONCE JERICHO REALIZED HE'D BEEN BAMBOOZLED, TYSON NAILED HIM WITH A TERRIFIC PUNCH TO THE JAW.



Saving the world,
one head at a time

the "The Society" get into a brawl with D-X, costing Punk a match by disqualification but putting WWE on notice that Punk's crew is a formidable new faction not to be trifled with.

Punk took his savior role seriously. He even shaved some fans' heads at non-televised house shows. He's allowed his beard to grow shaggy, and grew more wild-eyed than usual, cultivating a look that reminded some of 1960s cult leader Charles Manson, which was probably by design. (Could "CM" have stood for "Charlie Manson" all along?) It seemed Punk realized that he wasn't quite big enough to tangle with the likes of The Undertaker and other oversized Smackdown stars, so he invested in some backup. It was a smart move on the former champ's part. He'd always had the skills and the cunning; with a bit of help, there was no telling how far he could go.

CHRIS JERICHO AND GREGORY HELMS ARRESTED

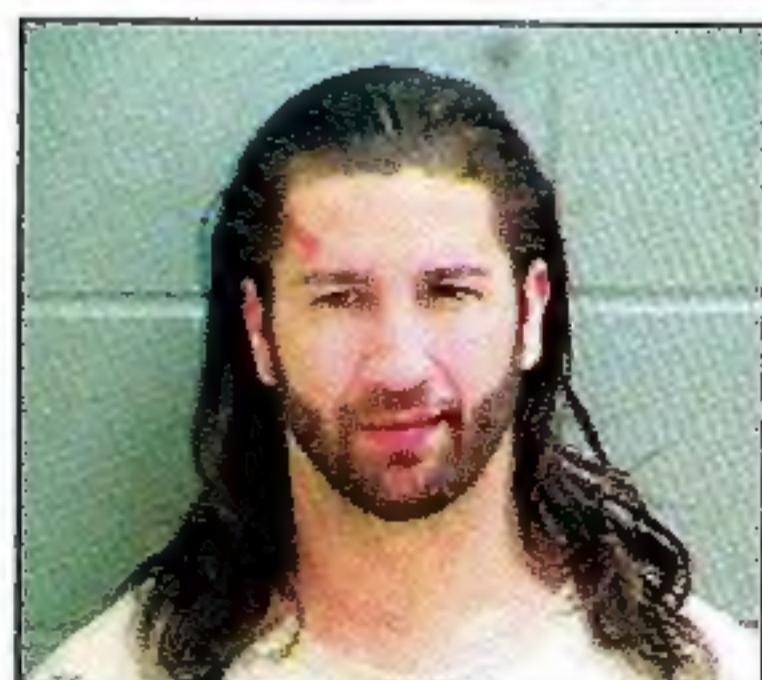
Chris Jericho and Gregory Helms were charged with public drunkenness after being arrested in Kenton County,

Kentucky, during the early morning hours of January 27. The incident involved several people, including Matt Hardy.

The group was traveling by cab after a *Smackdown* taping in Cincinnati, when Helms allegedly grew rowdy. A witness claimed that Helms started hitting people in the cab, including Jericho and a female traveler. The driver pulled into a Shell service station to call 9-1-1, which was when Hardy and Helms took off on foot. Helms returned to the gas station, where he and Jericho were arrested. They spent an hour or so in jail before being released and paying small fines. The people struck by Helms declined to press charges, and the woman later admitted that the scene had been blown out of proportion, and that the guys had merely been horsing around in the cab; she'd been struck by accident.

The story splashed down on gossip sites such as mtv.com and tmz.com, but Jim Ross was quick to downplay it on his blog. "Both these guys are great people and are credits to the biz, and I suggest that this well could be much to do about not much," Ross wrote. The general feeling at WWE was that Jericho had been caught in the middle of something, while Helms has a history of strange public behavior. Both Jericho and Helms poked fun at the situation on Twitter, first when Jericho performed at a karaoke bar and tweeted: "Where's TMZ when u need 'em?" In the same vein, Helms tweeted, "Been off the grid for a few days, what I miss?"

Actually, what Helms missed was an appearance at the Royal Rumble; he was pulled from the PPV and also pulled from TV tapings.



Jericho, Helms mug shots

THE GENERAL FEELING AT WWE WAS THAT JERICHO HAD BEEN CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF SOMETHING, WHILE HELMS HAS A HISTORY OF STRANGE PUBLIC BEHAVIOR.

WRESTLING ANNUAL

EDGE VS. SHAWN MICHAELS

WWE Royal Rumble, January 31, 2010

Photo by George Napolitano



**ANYONE WHO
THOUGHT
SHEAMUS'
UPSET WIN OVER
JOHN CENA HAD
BEEN
BEGINNER'S
LUCK HAD TO BE
IMRESSED BY
HIS HANDLING
OF ORTON.**

SHEAMUS BEATS RANDY ORTON, RETAINS TITLE

The Atlanta crowd was solidly behind Randy Orton as he squared off against new WWE champion Sheamus at the Royal Rumble, a clear indication that Sheamus has become a much-hated figure in WWE. How else could the slimy Orton be perceived as someone to cheer?

It was an intense match, with both stars trying to wear each other down with submission holds, Sheamus working on Orton's arm, Orton working on Sheamus' knee. When neither wrestler could gain an advantage for any significant length of time, Sheamus took the lead with a series of power moves and backbreakers. When the action spilled outside the ring, Orton's Legacy sidekick Cody Rhodes jumped over the guardrail and clocked Sheamus. This allowed Orton to nail Sheamus with an RKO, which looked to be all he needed to win. Orton was on the verge of scoring the pin when he found himself disqualified for outside interference. When Orton realized what had happened, he went about destroying Rhodes, which brought out fellow Legacy member Ted DiBiase Jr. After Orton flattened DiBiase, he turned around just in time to get a big boot in the face from Sheamus.

Anyone who thought Sheamus' upset win over John Cena had been beginner's luck had to be impressed by his handling of Orton. There were some who thought he had merely outmuscled Cena, and that Cena was unaccustomed to meeting someone who could match him in terms of strength. Orton

was expected to use his wit and wiles to take the new champion to school. Sheamus, meanwhile, showed us that he's nearly as clever as he is powerful. While he didn't quite match Orton move for move, he more than held his own with one of the smartest competitors on the planet.

EDGE WINS THE ROYAL RUMBLE

After a six-month absence to recover from Achilles tendon surgery, "The Rated R Superstar" shocked fans at the Philips Arena in Atlanta as he charged into the Rumble. He was the 29th of 30 entrants, immediately spearing Chris Jericho, Shawn Michaels, and John Cena, as if he'd been storing up months of rage while he convalesced. After Batista eliminated Michaels and Cena eliminated Batista, Edge eliminated Cena for the win and a title shot at WrestleMania 26. It was the WWE veteran's first Royal Rumble victory.

Edge's return from surgery was quicker than originally anticipated. Some assumed he'd be out for as long as a year, but Edge recovered in half that time. Was his return a total surprise, though? There'd already been some leaks on the Internet that his face was being used in the show's advertising, so some guessed correctly that he'd make an appearance. Still, few would've anticipated an Edge victory.

Jericho must've been shocked to see his former partner and rival. Jericho had been busy enough with Jeri-Show that he'd probably forgotten about Edge during the second half of 2009, but an Edge-Jericho feud seemed ripe for 2010. Judging by the roar of the Atlanta crowd that greeted his arrival, whatever Edge did during this comeback was going to be a moneymaker.

IN OTHER NEWS ...

Eric Escobar was released from his WWE contract, along with Dino Carter, D.J. Gabriel, Lennox McEnroe, Leroy Morgan, Lift Sawyer, and Sweet Papi Sanchez ... Georgiann Makropoulos, beloved wrestling columnist and former president of the Bruno Sammartino fan club, passed away at 68 ... Ring of

The "Celtic Warrior" goes toe-to-toe with the slithering Orton



Photo by George Napolitano

Honor filed a lawsuit against Ric Flair for backing out of an agreement to appear at ROH TV tapings ... Randy Orton signed a new 10-year contract with WWE ... Tara regained the TNA Knockouts title, beating ODB at the Genesis PPV... *The Tooth Fairy*, star-

ring Duane Johnson, opened to modest box office returns, tallying only \$14-million during its opening weekend ... "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin appeared on NBC's *Chuck* ... Ken Anderson, formerly "Mr. Kennedy," made his TNA debut at Genesis.

BUSINESS STORY OF THE MONTH: VINCE McMAHON JR. TAKES OVER WWE FILMS

It was announced in January that Vince McMahon was taking control of WWE Films, cutting ties with Lionsgate and 20th Century Fox. New deals were signed with Samuel Goldwyn Films, while various home viewing formats in North America would be handled by Vivendi Entertainment. International DVD distribution would be facilitated by WWE's existing television and video partners worldwide. WWE films released in America, however, would now be self-distributed and self-marketed.

According to a WWE press release, "The self-distribution model will allow WWE to maximize marketing efforts and create special-event experiences at select theaters nationwide."

WWE also made known its plans to produce and release nine movies during the next three years, three of which would be filmed in New Orleans, with hopes of retaining the rights to all films produced under the WWE name. This

supposedly had to do with the WWE's other plans involving a WWE TV channel, of which the films would be a part of the programming. Nine films in three years was considerably more ambitious than WWE Films' previous schedule, which was approximately seven movies in seven years, plus a documentary and one film that remained unreleased. It was also announced that WWE Films would change focus, moving away from violent action movies and more toward family fare and comedies, hoping to capture the WWE's backward aging audience.



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WRESTLER OF THE MONTH: AJ STYLES

It's almost a guarantee that beating Kurt Angle three times within a four-week period will get you serious consideration as Wrestler of the Month. If your matches with him happen to be epics, as was the case when AJ Styles beat Angle thrice in January, then everyone else in the business may as well start looking ahead to February.

Styles first defeated the former Olympic gold medalist on the groundbreaking January 4 edition *Impact*. Styles notched a second win over Angle at the Genesis pay-per-view, this time aligning himself with Ric Flair. Both bouts were candidates for Match of the Month. Styles struggled mightily in the third bout and seemed off his game, but when he found it within himself to reverse an anklelock on Angle, Styles emerged victorious thanks to a quick, screw job-style stoppage by referee Earl Hebner.

It may have been significant that Styles' trouble with Angle increased with each bout. Either Angle was gradually wearing him down, or having Flair in his corner was more of a distraction than a help. It could also be that



Photo by Lee Sorenson/TNA Wrestling

Styles' schedule as TNA World champion is enough to wear on anyone, for when Styles wasn't dueling with Angle, he had his hands full on other fronts. On the January 14 *Impact*, Styles was attacked by a masked thug who turned out to be his former partner Tomko. Styles got some revenge when he whipped Tomko later that night. Styles also took to the road, battling Daniels at various house shows. Styles capped off his memorable month by journeying to England for a live TNA event in Manchester, winning a four-way tornado match against Chris Daniels, Samoa Joe, and Hernandez.

MATCH OF THE MONTH: THE ROYAL RUMBLE

Although Edge's return brought the already intense Royal Rumble to a whole new boiling point, there were plenty of other things going on at the 23rd annual event.

Triple-H, for instance, went into Atlanta with a full head of steam. As tight as he and Shawn Michaels have been over the years, was Triple-H content to throw D-X merchandise into the crowd? Was he content with tag team action? And exactly how much friction was building between him and Michaels? John Cena had a lot at stake, too, since he'd vowed to not lose a match until he could

get Sheamus in the ring again. How would Batista do now that he was no longer a fan favorite? And would CM Punk be helped by his new posse?

The story on everyone's mind, though, was Michaels' quest for a rematch with The Undertaker at WrestleMania. The "Heartbreak Kid" was on fire as he entered the ring, hurling one competitor after another over the ropes, including Carlito, Cody Rhodes, Ted DiBiase Jr., John Morrison, Drew McIntyre, and even his old buddy Triple-H. He eliminated the most competitors of the night, bringing his career total of Rumble victims to 37, a new record.

There'd been some intrigue going into the bout when Michaels and Triple-H argued over who was going to win, and while Triple-H threw Michaels over the ropes on an episode of *Raw*, it was Michaels who smartly eliminated Triple-H at the Rumble. That Michaels lasted until nearly the end, fighting like a tiger against Batista, Cena, and Edge, made it almost poignant when Michaels found himself eliminated, his dreams of a return match with 'Taker apparently dashed.



Photo by George Napolitano

ODDBALL STORY OF THE MONTH: RANDY ORTON ACCUSED OF ASSAULTING FAN

The mother of a 15-year-old male fan filed a report with local police after Randy Orton allegedly spit on the boy and called him names. The confrontation was said to have taken place in the parking lot of Kowloon, a Chinese restaurant north of Boston that has for decades been a hangout for WWE stars.

According to the report, Orton supposedly spit gum in the boy's face and called him a "derogatory name." A hearing was requested for Orton to face charges of simple assault and battery. A clerk magistrate was to conclude if the incident warranted a criminal complaint.

Within days, Orton's side of the story was posted on his website. Orton claimed a woman approached him and scolded him for spitting on her "handicapped" son years ago. She'd also accused Orton of calling the boy "retarded." Orton doubted this was true. "Come on, people, even at my worst temperament, I would never call a handicapped child something awful like that. I'll actually sign anything for any child with any disability," Orton wrote. Orton added that his sarcastic response to the woman was, "So sue me." Four days later the woman filed assault charges.

A witness who was in the Kowloon lot at the time of the alleged attack came forward and told the *Saugus Advertiser* that Orton had merely rushed through a crowd of fans to get to his car. There'd been no confrontation, although Orton scowled at some kids who were swearing at him for not signing autographs.

"I guess if I've learned anything from this, it is not to ever challenge anyone to sue me," Orton wrote.



Photo by Stu Saks

WINNERS AND LOSERS

WINNERS

AJ STYLES: Anointed by Ric Flair

BRET HART: Despite the kick, returning to *Raw* was a small victory

VINCE McMAHON:

Probably wanted to kick Bret for a long time

TNA: Upped its audience by 25 percent in head-to-head with WWE

SHEAMUS: Doubters began to doubt themselves

LOSERS

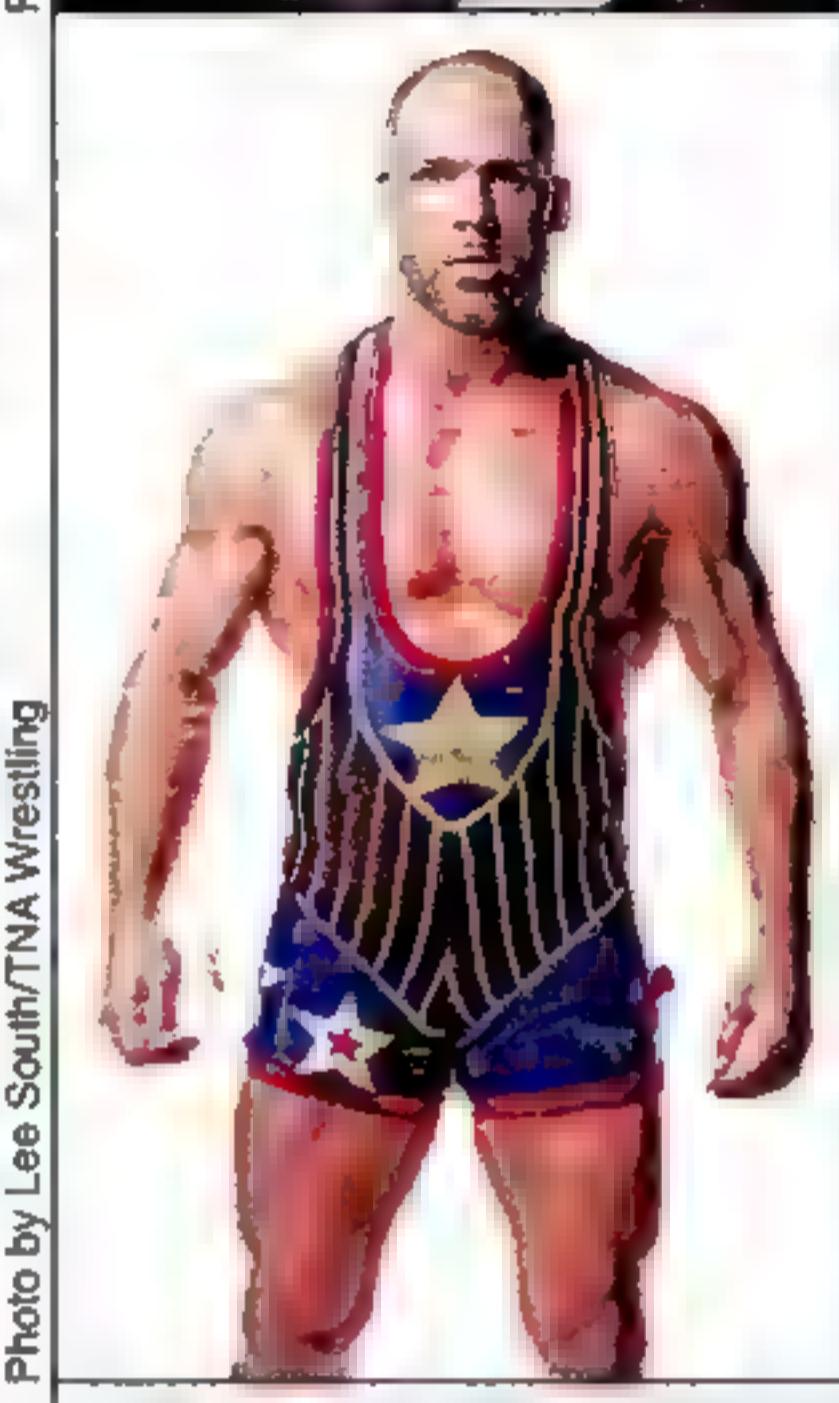
BUBBA THE LOVE SPONGE: He deserved a smack

GREGORY HELMS: Pushed his luck with bad behavior

CHRIS JERICHO: Punched by Tyson, busted in Kentucky, eliminated at Rumble

SHAWN MICHAELS: Failed in his mission to win Royal Rumble

KURT ANGLE: Styles had his number



busted up."

— **Consequences Creed**, *Inside Wrestling/The Wrestler*, Volume 32, 2010

"Could you imagine Rey Mysterio going in and doing a bunch of press slams on Batista? Me neither."

— **Rey Mysterio** on why he remains a high-flyer, *Inside Wrestling/The Wrestler*, Volume 32, 2010

"I'd rather drive a rusty ice pick through my eye than work a day with him."

— **Eric Bischoff** on Bubba the Love Sponge's radio show, denying rumors that The Honky Tonk Man was coming to TNA

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

QUOTES OF THE MONTH

"Bruddah, when I was 65 years old at WrestleMania 25, I broke the record for being the oldest man to compete at a WrestleMania. It doesn't stop. It just gets better."

— **Jimmy Snuka**, interviewed by Harry Burkett, *Inside Wrestling/The Wrestler* Volume 32, 2010

"I've never been interested in wrestling John Cena. The guys I wrestled in the past—from Goldberg to Hogan to Austin—were guys who I've really wanted to wrestle."

— **The Rock**, interviewed on Live Audio Wrestling

"Perhaps others have a different view of this man, but I personally found him to be somewhat obnoxious and he could be a bully if allowed to be such. Guys like Halme don't mix well in any locker room and need to be removed from the 'team' sooner than later."

— **Jim Ross**, blogging about the death of Tony Halme

"When a fan wants someone to stop what they are doing while standing at a urinal ... and then

gets miffed when one doesn't, [that] is taking things a little too far. This has happened to me."

— **Jim Ross**, blogging on how camera phones have changed the dynamic of fandom, jrsbarbbq.com

"From all the horror stories I've heard in WWE, there's no reason why I would want to go anywhere else. Desmond [Wolfe] and I are going to work together to make this company the best for everybody. Where, in the other company, they will stab each other in the back to get to the next level. It's not about me. It's about us in TNA."

— **AJ Styles**, interviewed in the U.K. by *The Sun*

"I have friends who have been in the business longer than me, and I see what their bodies have been through. They can't pick up their grandchildren. They can't play with their kids. I don't want to be taking arthritis medication because my knees are

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FEbruary

COMPILED BY **Dan Murphy**

FEBRUARY CAN BE a tricky month, with a WWE pay-per-view that has been known to change WrestleMania plans for those who are foolish enough to look past it.

This year's February pay-per-view promised to be even more unpredictable, as the event was set to feature a pair of Elimination Chamber bouts, one for the WWE title and one for the World heavyweight title. Edge may have earned a title shot with his Royal Rumble victory, but he was waiting to see who would walk out of the Chamber with the gold before announcing his intentions.

The WWE Universe was also bidding its farewell to the ECW brand and preparing for *NXT*, which pitted WWE newcomers in competition for a WWE contract.

At the same time, there was also plenty going on in TNA. After attracting 2.2 million viewers for the January 4 *Impact*, TNA management was discussing its next steps, and the wrestlers were buzzing about Eric Bischoff's new ranking system. There was an atmosphere of excitement and unpredictability, and those close to TNA sensed that a major announcement was on its way.

Ring of Honor had a buzz of its own. After Austin Aries and Tyler Black had gone to a 60-minute draw two months earlier, it was announced that the two would square off in a rematch at the company's eighth anniversary card in New York City. This time, there would be winner.

There was an air of anticipation throughout the wrestling world. And by

the time the month ended, history would be made in all three promotions.

JACK BRISCO DIES AFTER SURGERY

Jack Brisco, a two-time NWA World champion and a member of every wrestling hall of fame worth its charter, died on February 1 after complications from open heart surgery. He was 68 years old.

A brilliant collegiate wrestler who won the NCAA championship in 1965 as a junior at Oklahoma State, Brisco was recruited into the professional wrestling ranks and began winning championships in the Midwest and Florida. A superior mat wrestler, Brisco earned praise for his smooth wrestling abilities and his legitimate toughness.

On July 20, 1973, Brisco defeated Harley Race to win the NWA World title. He lost the belt to Giant Baba on December 4, 1974, but regained it just four days later. His second reign lasted another year until he dropped the title to Terry Funk. Brisco spent most of his career as a popular fan favorite, because of his fluid style and sportsmanship and his marquee good looks. With his thick hair and easy smile, he was frequently compared to Joe Namath during the 1960s.

Brisco also formed a successful tag team with his brother, Jerry. He and Jerry

Jack Brisco, amateur and pro champion, dies at 68



BRISCO HELD CHAMPIONSHIPS IN ALL THE MAJOR NWA TERRITORIES DURING THE LATE-1960S THROUGH THE 1970s, AND WAS CONSIDERED TO BE ONE OF THE PREMIER RING TECHNICIANS OF ALL-TIME.

appeared on the first Starrcade supercard in 1983, losing the NWA tag team title to Rick Steamboat and Jay Youngblood.

He and Jerry also acquired a minority ownership stake in Georgia Championship Wrestling, ultimately convincing their fellow shareholders to sell to Vince McMahon in 1984, thus enabling the WWF to eliminate the NWA from its national cable carrier, WTBS. Brisco retired from wrestling that year.

Brisco held championships in all the major NWA territories during the late-1960s through the 1970s, and was considered to be one of the premier ring technicians of all-time. He was a charter member of *The Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame and was enshrined in the WWE Hall of Fame in 2008. The Professional Wrestling Hall of Fame in Upstate New York, the Cauliflower Alley Club, and the International Wrestling Museum in Iowa have also honored him.

TYLER BLACK WINS ROH TITLE

Tyler Black's road to the Ring of Honor heavyweight title was long and arduous. He broke onto the scene with a career-making showing against then-champion Nigel McGuinness back at Take No Prisoners 2008. But it wasn't until February 13, 2010—nearly two full years after that match against McGuinness—that Black was finally able

Aries sees it, can't prevent it

to collect the ROH championship.

Black had wrestled ROH champion Austin Aries to a 60-minute draw in December 2009. In this highly anticipated rematch, ROH selected three judges (Roderick Strong, Kenny King, and Jim Cornette) to declare a winner should the match end in another time-limit draw.

Aries took the early advantage, battering the challenger with a series of aerial attacks, but Black continually fought out of pin attempts. As the tide turned, all three judges eventually climbed onto the apron and attempted to interfere, and all three were sent to the floor by the two participants. After superkicking Cornette to the floor, Black dropped Aries to his knees with one superkick, then nailed him with a second one, sending Aries slumping to the mat. Black scampered up the turnbuckle and landed a moonsault to score the victory and claim the championship.

After the match, the new champion was hoisted up on the shoulders of The Briscoe Brothers and celebrated with ROH owner Cary Silkin, Delirious, El Generico, and other members of the ROH roster. Black may have waited two years for this moment, but that only made the celebration that much sweeter.

NXT DEBUTS WITH ROH DREAM MATCH

No one quite knew what to expect from WWE's wrestling-reality show hybrid, but *WWE NXT* hit a home run with its debut episode on February 22, featuring a dream match of Ring of Honor legend Daniel Bryan against WWE World champion Chris Jericho.

Bryan, who was mentored by The Miz, got in plenty of offense and kept Jericho reeling with his submission-style attack. Jericho eluded a suicide dive that sent Bryan crashing into the announcers' table, resulting in a nasty bruise to Bryan's ribs. Still, the former ROH champion nearly scored a submission victory over Jericho until getting caught with a Codebreaker and tapping out to the Walls of Jericho.

Despite his low-key demeanor, Bryan quickly established himself as a favorite to win the eight-man competi-



Photo by Scott Finkelstein



POLICE SAID BEEMS HAD PUNCHED FLAIR SEVERAL TIMES IN THE FACE AFTER THE COUPLE HAD RETURNED HOME FROM A RESTAURANT. ALCOHOL WAS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN A FACTOR IN THE INCIDENT.

tion, where WWE developmental prospects were paired with veteran WWE superstars. Upon the conclusion of the series, the WWE mentors would vote to determine which "rookie" was most impressive. The mentors would not be allowed to vote either for or against their assigned "rookie."

Other *NXT* talent included Darren Young (mentored by CM Punk), David Otunga (mentored by R-Truth), Heath Slater (mentored by Christian), Justin Gabriel (mentored by Matt Hardy), Michael Tarver (mentored by Carlito), Skip Sheffield (mentored by William Regal), and Wade Barrett (mentored by Jericho).

The show was hosted by Matt Striker and featured the team of Michael Cole and Josh Matthews on commentary.

The debut episode drew positive reviews from critics who hailed it as a unique way to introduce new talent and to give a more visible role to some of the WWE mentors.

FLAIR'S WIFE CHARGED WITH ASSAULT

Ric Flair found himself embroiled in yet another embarrassing brush with the law on February 21, when his fourth wife, Jacqueline Bains Beems, was arrested for domestic violence.

According to a statement issued by Flair's agent, Flair and his wife had "an unfortunate disagreement" that turned physical. Flair suffered minor injuries. Beems was charged with misdemeanor assault and was released from jail the following day.

Police responded to a call to the couple's home in South Charlotte, North Carolina, around 11:40 p.m. Police said Beems had punched Flair several times in the face after the couple had returned home from a restaurant. Alcohol was believed to have been a factor in the incident, according to local newspaper reports. The couple was married in

November 2009.

"Ric finds this incident unsettling and is committed to correcting any issues in his personal life," his agent, Melinda Morris Zanoni, said in a statement.

The incident is the latest in a string of arrests involving Flair and his family. In 2005, Flair was arrested in an alleged road rage incident. In 2008, Flair sustained minor injuries in a domestic incident that ended with his daughter being arrested. And in 2009, Flair's son Reid was arrested for driving while impaired and for possession of heroin.

The incident received widespread news coverage, including outlets such as *TMZ On TV* and *USA Today*.

JERICHO, BATISTA WIN TITLES

The Elimination Chamber match is one of the most unpredictable in wrestling. When a championship is defended within the unforgiving confines of the chamber, any participant could emerge as champion.

And sometimes, the guy with the



Jericho gets some help from below

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belt at the end of the night isn't in the match at all.

Both the WWE and the World heavyweight titles changed hands at the Elimination Chamber pay-per-view on February 21.

The Raw Chamber bout pitted champion Sheamus against John Cena, Triple-H, Randy Orton, Ted DiBiase Jr., and Kofi Kingston. DiBiase Jr. pinned Orton after blasting him with a metal pipe. Kingston landed a buzzsaw kick to pin DiBiase Jr., then fell victim to a Celtic Cross from Sheamus and was eliminated, whittling the field down to Cena, Sheamus, and HHH.

Triple-H caught Sheamus with a Pedigree and eliminated the "Celtic Warrior," ensuring that a new WWE champion would be crowned. Cena quickly grabbed Triple-H in the STF and managed to get a rare submission out of him to win the match and the title.

But as Cena was celebrating, Vince McMahon announced that Cena would have to defend his title against Batista. Batista nailed the exhausted Cena with a spear and won the championship.

In the second Chamber bout, Undertaker defended his World title against CM Punk, R-Truth, Rey Mysterio Jr., Chris Jericho, and John Morrison. Punk quickly eliminated R-Truth, but was himself eliminated by Mysterio. Morrison pinned the luchador with the Starship Pain, then succumbed to a chokeslam from "The Phenom." Taker was setting up Jericho for a tombstone piledriver when Shawn Michaels emerged from beneath the ring and connected with Sweet Chin Music. That interference allowed Jericho to score the pinfall and take the title.

"POPE" WINS EIGHT-CARD STUD TOURNAMENT

Hulk Hogan announced that TNA would be holding an Eight-Card Stud Tournament, with the winner earning a title shot against the TNA World champion.

Qualifying matches were held on *Impact* and the tournament field was finalized: Desmond Wolfe, "Pope" D'Angelo Dinero, Matt Morgan, Hernandez, Kurt Angle, Mr. Anderson, Abyss, and

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



D'Angelo studs outs

Mick Foley.

It was an impressive field of talent that included three former TNA (or NWA) heavyweight champions in Angle, Abyss, and Foley, and two men who have worn the unofficial tag of "Future World Champion" in Morgan and Anderson.

The tournament unfolded at Against All Odds. In the opening match, Dinero scored an upset victory over Wolfe, avenging his loss at Genesis the previous month. Morgan beat Hernandez by capitalizing on his partner's shoulder injury and grabbing a handful of tights for insurance. In another upset, Anderson defeated Angle after Angle struck his head on the uncovered turnbuckle and fell victim to a Mic Check. In the final first-round match, Abyss pinned Foley after a Black Hole Slam onto a mound of tacks.

Dinero advanced to the finals with a win over Morgan, connecting with a DDE after Morgan missed a Carbon Footprint and became tangled in the ropes. Anderson outsmarted Abyss by turning around his mask and connecting with a Mic Check.

Prior to the final, Scott Hall and Sean Waltman inexplicably attacked Dinero, injuring his ribs. A visibly injured Dinero went to the ring for his match against Anderson, who ruthlessly attacked Dinero's midsection. But Anderson became overconfident and Dinero surprised him with a DDE and

PRIOR TO THE FINAL, SCOTT HALL AND SEAN WALTMAN INEXPICABLY ATTACKED DINERO, INJURING HIS RIBS. A VISIBLY INJURED DINERO WENT TO THE RING FOR HIS MATCH AGAINST ANDERSON, WHO RUTHLESSLY ATTACKED DINERO'S MIDSECTION.

WHILE THE BROKEN LEG MAY HAVE BEEN A RUSE, HART'S TRUE PHYSICAL CONDITION REMAINED UNKNOWN, WITH REPORTS CIRCULATING THAT HE WAS STILL SUFFERING EFFECTS FROM THE STROKE HE SUFFERED IN 2002.

Straight from his limo to an ambulance

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scored the pinfall to win the tournament and become the top contender to AJ Styles' title.

BRET HART "INJURED" IN BACKSTAGE CAR ACCIDENT

Bret Hart entered the ring on the February 15 edition of *Raw* to say farewell to his WWE fans. He thanked them for their support through the years, and ran down Vince McMahon for failing to appear and for not agreeing to face him in a match at WrestleMania.

Once he has said his piece, Hart left the ring and said goodbye to some of the wrestlers backstage. John Cena tried to get Hart to change his mind, but Hart said it was time for him to go. With a word of encouragement for Cena, Hart went to get inside his limousine and leave the arena.

However, another car apparently backed into Hart's limo, crushing Hart's left leg between the door and the frame of the car. Cena and other WWE personnel scrambled to extract Hart, and WWE later reported that Hart had suffered a broken leg in the incident.

It seemed that the injury would prevent Hart from competing at WrestleMania. Two weeks after the suspicious incident, McMahon told

Hart he was accepting his challenge, then mocked Hart when he said he was unable to compete due to the injury. McMahon kicked Hart's leg out from underneath him, prompting Hart to angrily accept McMahon's challenge.

While the broken leg may have been a ruse, Hart's true physical condition remained unknown, with reports circulating that he was still suffering effects from the stroke he suffered in 2002. Even "The Hitman's" biggest fans wondered if he was making a mistake by considering a comeback, even if it was just one match.

STYLES TURNS BACK CHALLENGE FROM SAMOA JOE

Samoa Joe told *PWI* Senior Writer Dan Murphy that he tried to reach out to AJ Styles, who he thought was being brainwashed by his new manager, Ric Flair, but that Styles was beyond his reach. "I don't know what's gotten into AJ. I don't know if it's the money or Flair's BS. Why should he be a knock-off of Ric Flair when he's already more of a man than Flair ever will be? ... It's about time for someone to beat some sense into him."

Joe got his chance at Against All Odds, as he cashed in his Feast or Fired World title shot to take on a man he had considered to be a brother.

Styles had Flair in his corner, but he also had to contend with one of Flair's arch-enemies, Eric Bischoff, serving as the self-appointed guest referee. After a very physical back-and-forth match, Joe caught Styles with a Muscle-buster and seemed to have the champion beaten. However, when he went for the cover, Bischoff was outside the ring, arguing with Flair. Bischoff punched Flair and returned to the ring as an angry Joe demanded he pay better attention to the match. As Joe ripped into Bischoff, Styles was able to connect with a sudden Pele kick and a Styles Clash. Reluctantly, Bischoff counted the pinfall, awarding the match to Styles.

To pour salt in Bischoff's wounds, Flair then demanded Bischoff raise Styles' arm in victory.

WRESTLING

ANNUAL

SAMOA JOE vs AJ STYLES
TNA Against All Odds, February 14, 2010

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling





Abyss draws power from a WWE ring

THE MOMENT ABYSS PUT THE RING ON HIS FINGER, HE RECEIVED A HUGE BOOST OF CONFIDENCE AND CLAIMED HE FELT THE POWER OF EVERY HULKAMANIAC OF ALL-TIME COURSING THROUGH HIS BODY.

ABYSS GETS THE POWER OF THE RING

Forget about Frodo and Gollum and the Eye of Sauron. The most powerful ring in the universe isn't the One Ring. Apparently, it's Hulk Hogan's WWE Hall of Fame ring. Or at least that's what Hogan and Abyss would have us believe.

When Abyss failed to use a baseball bat wrapped in barbed wire during his Against All Odds match against Mick Foley as he was instructed to by Eric Bischoff, a furious Bischoff demanded Abyss surrender his mask as a way to humiliate the man-monster. Just as Bischoff, Desmond Wolfe, Homicide, Raven, Rhino, and Tomko were about to remove the mask, Hogan intervened and took Abyss back to his office.

Instead of reading Abyss the riot act, Hogan removed his ring and presented it to Abyss, claiming that the ring contained the power of Hulkamania. Hogan promised Abyss that if he wore the ring he would be "10 times the man and 10 times the wrestler that Hulk Hogan ever was," and that the ring would make Abyss the strongest man in the world.

The moment Abyss put the ring on his finger, he received a huge boost of confidence and claimed he felt the power of every Hulkamaniac of all-time coursing through his body.

Apparently, Hulk's ring was of a higher caliber than the WWE Hall of Fame ring Superstar Graham auctioned off on eBay. But in any case, Hulk's gift helped bring the monster back out of Abyss as he went on to stand up to both AJ Styles and Ric Flair one week later.

UNDERTAKER ACCEPTS MICHAELS' CHALLENGE

The Undertaker refused Shawn Michaels' plea for redemption, so the "Heartbreak Kid" took matters into his own hands.

Michaels had been showing signs of frustration for weeks, with that frustration increasing as WrestleMania grew closer and closer. He failed to win the

Royal Rumble, which would have given him his coveted shot at The Undertaker. His pleas to 'Taker and to Vince McMahon fell on deaf ears. Michaels came close to his breaking point when he lost his cool and superkicked Smackdown General Manager Theodore Long when Long refused to sign a rematch of 2009's Match of the Year.

At the Elimination Chamber pay-per-view on February 21, "The Dead Man" stepped into the cage as the World champion, and despite a pyrotechnic mishap on the way to the ring (see "Oddball Story Of The Month"), the champion appeared to have the match well in hand. That's when Michaels emerged from his hiding place underneath the ring and hit his Sweet Chin Music, hand (or foot) delivering the World championship to Chris Jericho.

The following night on *Raw*, Undertaker confronted Michaels and said Michaels now had his full attention. Michaels again challenged Undertaker to a WrestleMania rematch and The Undertaker accepted, with one condition: Michaels would be forced to retire if he lost.

Michaels readily accepted the condition, declaring he had no career if he couldn't beat Undertaker at WrestleMania. This made the long-rumored rematch official and set the stakes: The Streak against Michaels' career.

IN OTHER NEWS ...

Royal Rumble winner Edge made his WrestleMania intentions clear by challenging former tag team partner Chris Jericho for the World title ... The final edition of *ECW On Syfy* aired on February 16. A note trivia buffs may want to remember: The last match in ECW history was Christian Cage vs. Ezekiel Jackson in a match that saw Jackson win the soon-to-be-retired ECW title ... WWE announced that WrestleMania 27 would be held at the Georgia Dome in Atlanta, the same arena where Bill Goldberg beat Hulk Hogan for the WCW World title back in 1998 ... Canada's independent scene was buzzing about the announcement that two of Ontario's largest independent promotions, Border City Wrestling (based in Windsor) and Blood, Sweat, and Ears

Pro Wrestling (based in Mississauga) would be merging into Maximum Pro Wrestling. Scott D'Amore, the head of Border City Wrestling, said the new promotion was working toward landing a TV deal ... Michelle McCool recaptured the WWE Women's title after guest referee Vickie Guerrero slapped Mickie James and essentially handed over the title belt ... Kia Stevens (better known as Awesome Kong) filed suit against radio personality Bubba the Love Sponge, claiming Bubba or someone from his show called her in the early morning hours and made racist threats to her. Bubba denied the allegations ... Charlie Haas, Maria, Paul Birchall, Gregory Helms, and referee Scott Armstrong were released by WWE ...

Raw crossed over into the surreal February 15, when, with Jerry Springer hosting, Santino Marella, Michael Cole, Jerry Lawler, and Hornswoggle all claimed to be the father of Kelly Kelly's unborn baby. The segment turned out to be a charade to poke fun at Springer, who ended up taking a big smooch from Mae Young ... Daffney unleashed her inner sadism, savagely attacking both Tara and ODB in subsequent weeks, earning a pair of DQ losses in TNA ... Samoa Joe was abducted by a group of masked men on the February 18 edition of *Impact* ... Former National Wrestling Federation announcer (and son of promoter Pedro Martinez) Ron Martinez died from a heart attack in his home in Seffner, Florida, at age 57.

BUSINESS STORY OF THE MONTH: TNA ANNOUNCES MOVE TO MONDAY NIGHTS

On February 16, the rumors were confirmed as Dixie Carter and Hulk Hogan announced TNA *Impact* would be moving to Monday nights, beginning March 8.

The move brought TNA head-to-head against WWE's Raw franchise, marking the first time two national wrestling promotions have competed head-to-head on prime-time television since the Monday Night War between WCW and the WWF in the mid-1990s.

"On January 4, wrestling fans showed us they're ready for a new professional wrestling alternative on Monday nights and we're answering that call," said Carter, the company president. "Bringing *Impact* to Mondays is our most exciting move yet in a year that's already been filled with huge milestones for TNA."

Hogan promised that many surprises were in store and that big changes would be taking place. "Monday nights are now officially the best night of the week to be a fan of professional wrestling," Hogan said. "This change is great

for the business, and all fans of professional wrestling will benefit because of it."

Despite the optimism displayed by Carter, Hogan, and Spike TV executives, some industry analysts wondered if TNA was making a major mistake by running directly against WWE programming, especially since *Impact*'s ratings steadily decreased after an initial rise when the Hogan and Bischoff regime first came to TNA.

TNA heavily advertised the big March 8 Monday Night debut, and Spike TV executives revealed that Rob Van Dam was scheduled to debut on the telecast. TNA was clearly preparing for the biggest battle in the company's history.

WRESTLER OF THE MONTH: THE MIZ

One man. Three title belts. That is pretty awesome.

The Miz became the most decorated man in WWE, and got more TV time than any other WWE superstar in February.

Fresh off successfully defending his U.S. title against MVP at the Royal Rumble, Miz formed an alliance with The Big Show. On the

February 8 edition of Raw, Show-Miz defeated D-X and CM Punk and Luke Gallows in a triple-threat elimination match to win the Unified tag team championship. Miz scored the winning pinfall with a rollup on Shawn Michaels.

As Unified tag team champion, Miz was allowed to appear on both the Raw and

(continued on next page)

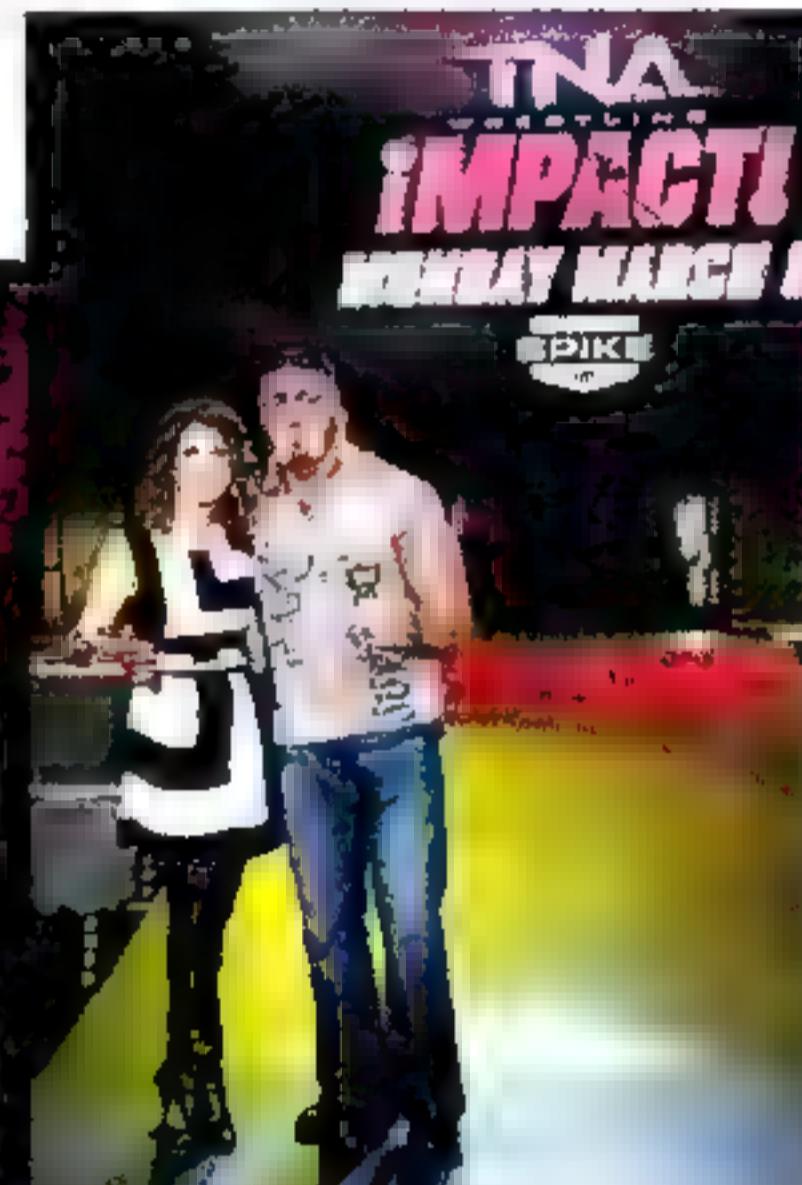


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



Photo by Shu Saka

(continued from previous page)

Smackdown brands. He also found himself with a featured role on *NXT* as the mentor to Daniel Bryan. Miz was appearing three nights a week, constantly telling the world just how awesome he was. At the Elimination Chamber PPV, Miz once again defeated MVP.

Miz did plenty of bragging, but he was able to back all

of it up. Not many people have pinned Michaels, pinned MVP, and slapped Bryan upside the head all within a two-week span.

Admittedly, it wasn't a perfect month (Show-Miz did drop a non-title match to MVP and Mark Henry), but February was Miz' month... and the former reality show star took every opportunity he could to let us know about it.

MATCH OF THE MONTH: DANIEL BRYAN vs. CHRIS JERICHO

One of the most intriguing matches in recent memory took place on February 22 with little fanfare and no advance notice.

On the debut episode of *WWE NXT*, The Miz announced that his protégé, Daniel Bryan (the former Bryan Danielson, who has been considered one of the best pound-for-pound wrestlers in the game for the past seven years) would be making his WWE TV debut against none other than the reigning World champion, Chris Jericho.

Bryan offered a handshake, but Jericho pushed his hand away and pie-faced the former ROH champion. Bryan responded with a slap, a dropkick, and a running knee strike in the corner. Jericho came back with a dropkick of his own and a series of running kicks, then slowed the pace of the match with a half-nelson chinlock. Jericho worked Bryan over in the corners, but made a tactical error when he

rushed Bryan, who eluded the shoulderblock and sent Jericho crashing into the steel corner post. Bryan came back with a series of stiff roundhouse kicks and a leg whip, then rocked the champion with knee strikes and a wicked lariat.

Jericho rolled to the floor for a breather. Bryan charged with a suicide plancha, but Jericho steered Bryan into the announce table. Bryan's back bruised immediately, but the pain reinvigorated the WWE newcomer. He snared Jericho in a leg grapevine that had Jericho screaming in pain and flailing for the ropes.

Jericho managed to reach the ropes for the break, then surprised Bryan with a Codebreaker. He locked Bryan in the Walls of Jericho (which applied pressure on Bryan's injured ribs) to earn the submission victory at the 5:56 mark. It was a memorable debut for Bryan and a thrilling, albeit brief, bout.

ODDBALL STORY OF THE MONTH: UNDERTAKER GETS SINGED BY FIREWORKS

The Undertaker is known for his dramatic entrances, but his entrance at the Elimination Chamber pay-per-view was not just dramatic. It was downright dangerous.

The Undertaker was making his usual methodical march to the ring, accompanied by his signature heavy fog and pyrotechnic blasts. However, an error in timing was made, causing one of the fireball pyrotechnic displays to fire as Undertaker was standing directly next to it. For an instant, Undertaker was engulfed in flames. He quickly pulled off his heavy jacket and ran into the ring.

Undertaker was attended to by both the referee and a ringside physician. Fortunately, he suffered only minor first- and second-degree burns in the incident. His injuries were described as being similar to a sunburn. He was cleared to compete.

Most of the fans in attendance and viewers at home never noticed the incident due to the heavy fog; however, frightening photos of the errant pyrotechnic display made their way online a short time later.

Both WWE and St. Louis fire officials announced they would be conducting investigations into the cause of the accident. The Missouri State Fire Marshal's Office said state officials were not contacted about the incident.

Undertaker did not miss any time due to the incident and went on to compete for 25 minutes in the Elimination Chamber bout.

WINNERS AND LOSERS

QUOTES OF THE MONTH

"You know who Superman is? Well, he's got a cape. Makes him real powerful. Do you know who Popeye is? He's got the can of spinach. Makes him real, real strong ... Do you know what this is? This is Hulk Hogan's Hall of Fame ring. This is my life. This is the only thing that never left me ... Put your hand out. This is yours. This will give you the power of the universe. This will make you the strongest mortal man on the earth."

—Hulk Hogan, apparently oblivious to Superman's origin, making a point to Abyss on *Impact*

"I'm going to tell you right now they probably have the best—and I'm saying this with all respect to AJ—they probably have the best wrestler I've been around in a long time ... and I love my friends in the WWE, and they would say the same thing: Kurt Angle. He is a machine, and he's a different kind of cat. He lives and breathes a different kind of oxygen than me, and he reminds me so much of me when I was about 30 years old. He's relentless in his pursuit every night, proving he is who he is."

—Ric Flair, on *Monday Night Mayhem*, naming Kurt Angle the top wrestler in the world today

"What I was thinking I was going to do was I was going to go on a reality TV show, get a faux-hawk, and then come out here and act like an idiot. Oh, wait, no, no! That's already been done, and it was done by you."

—Daniel Bryan, answering The Miz' question on how he plans to show some personality and become a star in WWE, on the debut episode of *WWE NXT*

"It's like if you're watching porn and the guy in the movie isn't enjoying himself. Then, I'm like, 'Oh man, I don't wanna watch this' ... You know what I'm saying? You wanna watch someone who is enjoying what



WINNERS

"POPE" D'ANGELO

DINERO: Proved he was a Stud by winning tournament

SHAWN MICHAELS: Got the match he wanted, but would it be his last?

ABYSS: Even The Green Lantern is jealous of his ring

BATISTA: It pays to buddy up to The Boss

TYLER BLACK: Finally got that monkey off his back

LOSERS

ERIC BISCHOFF: No allies in sight, and even Hogan doesn't trust him

BRET HART: Too bad he couldn't get WWE HOF'er James Dudley as his driver

SHEAMUS: Dropped the belt, suffered a concussion, and fell out of the title picture overnight

MICKIE JAMES: There always seem to be forces aligned against her

PAUL BIRCHALL: "The Ripper" could just never get any momentum going for him

they're doing. That's why I watch [porn], that's why all us guys watch it."

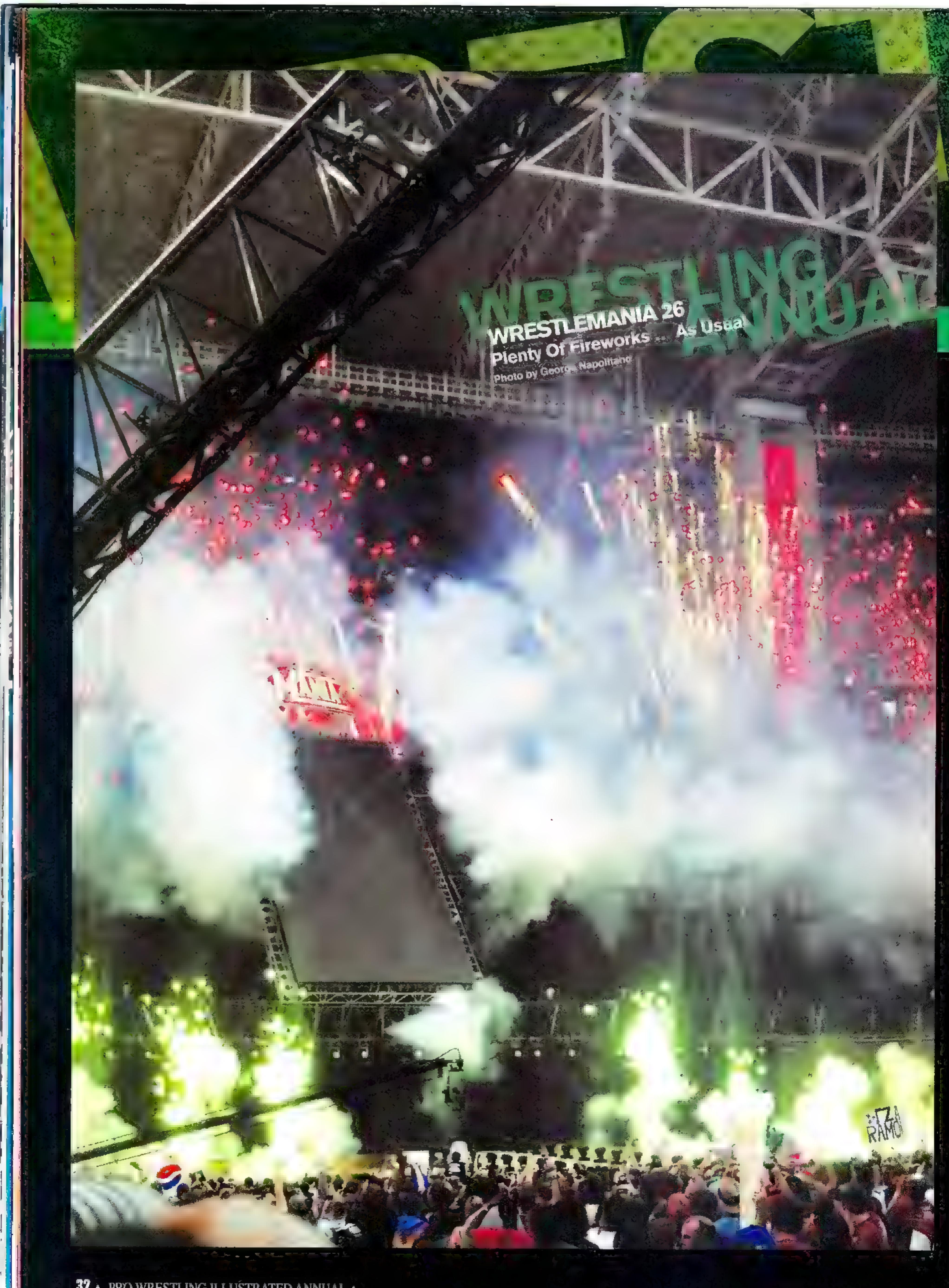
—Shad Gaspard telling *SLAM! Wrestling* the importance of enjoying your job while wrestling and revealing far too much about the WWE locker room's TV viewing habits

"I told the WWE office if they didn't set up a TV backstage in Abilene so I can watch the game that I would skip the show. I wasn't kidding!"

—Chris Jericho, tweeting about his demands to see the Olympic gold medal hockey game between Canada and the United States

"I didn't come here tonight to make peace. I didn't come here for any kind of closure. I came here to talk to Vince McMahon face to face. If you don't come down here, Vince, I'll come up there with a camera crew and find you."

—Bret Hart, calling out Vince McMahon, before issuing a challenge for *WrestleMania*



WRESTLEMANIA MARCH

COMPILED BY Luke Dormehl

MARCH IS THE biggest month on the professional wrestling calendar. The reason for this, quite obviously, is WrestleMania, the cherished brainchild of Vince McMahon and professional wrestling's answer to the Super Bowl.

In 2010, the 26th edition of WrestleMania proved to be the third-highest grossing wrestling card in WWE history, with \$39-million in revenue. The event, which took place at the University of Phoenix Stadium in Glendale, Arizona, was attended by 72,219 fans, with another 885,000 watching on pay-per-view.

TNA, meanwhile, received quite a bit of attention for a business decision that would not be quite as successful as the advent of WrestleMania. Buoyed by the success of the live Monday night special episode of *Impact* in January, TNA took the plunge by moving its flagship show to go up against WWE's *Monday Night Raw*.

March saw decade-old rivalries come to a head, first-time champions crowned, and a legend depart the sport in perhaps WWE's most heartbreak moment of the year.

With everything from dream matches coming together to more mainstream media exposure than you could shake a kendo stick at, there wasn't a more exciting month on the 2010 calendar than March.

UNDERTAKER EXTENDS WM STREAK, SENDS HBK INTO RETIREMENT

It was never quite clear why The Undertaker forced the retirement stipula-

tion on Shawn Michaels as the only way he would grant HBK the match he so desperately craved. Maybe he was just wanted a chance to eliminate the only man whose track record for success in WWE rivaled his own.

Still, experts pointed out prior to their WrestleMania 26 showdown that The Undertaker had, in effect, provided Michaels with motivation that made 'Taker's desire to extend his WrestleMania winning streak pale in comparison.

The experts were wrong. Undertaker knew all along that a desperately inspired Michaels would only raise the level of his own game. He succeeded in retiring Michaels, while also extending his WM winning streak to 18, retaining the WWE World title, and proving to any remaining doubters that he is one of the smartest competitors the game has ever seen.

Undertaker was not only smart, he was classy. Rather than relish the moment of victory, he shook Michaels' hand and left the ring to allow HBK to have a private moment with 72,219 of his closest friends.

By the time Michaels made his fare-

Undertaker-Michaels was one of the year's top stories



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THE PG THING IS A REAL DEAL. GREAT DIRECTION FOR THE WWE, A WISE DECISION, ALTHOUGH [IT] TOOK 92% OF MY VOCABULARY AWAY.'

Has Sting gone batty?



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

well speech, on the March 29 edition of *Raw*, there was barely a dry eye in the house. While Michaels finished with the poignant signoff, "Shawn Michaels has left the building," the fans in attendance perhaps summed it up best of all by chanting: "Thank you, Shawn."

MONDAY NIGHT WAR: ROUND 2

Based on the success of TNA's three-hour Monday night experiment on January 4, the decision was made to move *Impact* to Monday nights full-time in order to compete directly against *Raw* on a weekly basis, beginning March 8. TNA President Dixie Carter had previously proclaimed that TNA was not satisfied being the second-largest wrestling company in the world and, with Eric Bischoff and Hulk Hogan as her wing men, it truly resembled the original Monday Night War between WCW and the WWF—with both companies competing for the attention of wrestling fans.

"This is a new beginning for TNA," Carter said in a press release. "We've worked hard to get here, and I'm confident that if people tune in to TNA for the first time on March 8, they won't be disappointed."

As with their January 4 showing, TNA pulled all the stops out to make *Impact* a memorable night. Sting

shocked the wrestling world by attacking the good guys and, when questioned why by Carter, telling her that he owed no explanation. Jeff Hardy, and Shannon Moore made their returns to TNA, while Rob Van Dam and Hulk Hogan made their in-ring debuts for the company.

Raw, meanwhile, parried with an in-ring faceoff between WrestleMania opponents, Shawn Michaels and The Undertaker, Ted DiBiase Jr. and Cody Rhodes teaming against Randy Orton, a brawl between Sheamus and Triple-H, and a challenging gauntlet match for John Cena, which ended when he was attacked by Batista and pinned by WWE Chairman Mr. McMahon.

In the end, the victory on March 8 belonged to *Raw*, as it beat *Impact* with a 3.4 rating (5.1 million viewers) to *Impact*'s 0.98 (1.4 million viewers).

"STONE-COLD" MAKES RAW RETURN

In his first WWE TV appearance since the 2009 Hall of Fame ceremony, "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin marched out on the March 15 episode of *Raw* to act as the show's guest host. With the familiar sound of breaking glass to signal his arrival, the trademark drinking-on-the-job Steveweisers, the crowd chants of "What?", and the black T-shirt and jeans shorts, the only thing missing visually were the trademark middle fingers—thanks to WWE's more family-friendly PG rating.

"The PG thing is a real deal. Great direction for the WWE, a wise decision, although [it] took 92% of my vocabulary away," Austin posted in a message to his followers on Twitter shortly after his appearance.

"The Texas Rattlesnake" may have been on *Raw* primarily to officiate the contract signing between Bret Hart and Vince McMahon for their match at WrestleMania, but that didn't stop him from also interacting with a few former rivals, including Shawn Michaels and The Big Show.

Surprisingly for the hell-raising superstar, there were no "Stone-



UNREST
CHRIS DANIELS VS.
BRIAN KENDRICK
TNA Slammiversary,
March 21, 2010

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

**WITH JERICHO
STILL REELING
FROM THE EDGE-
INFlicted
ASSAULT,
HE WAS
POWERLESS
TO RESIST AS
SWAGGER
PICKED HIM
UP IN THE
GUT-WRENCH
POWER BOMB,
AND BROUGHT
HIM CRASHING
DOWN TO THE
MAT FOR THE
PIN.**

Swagger is about
to break the bank

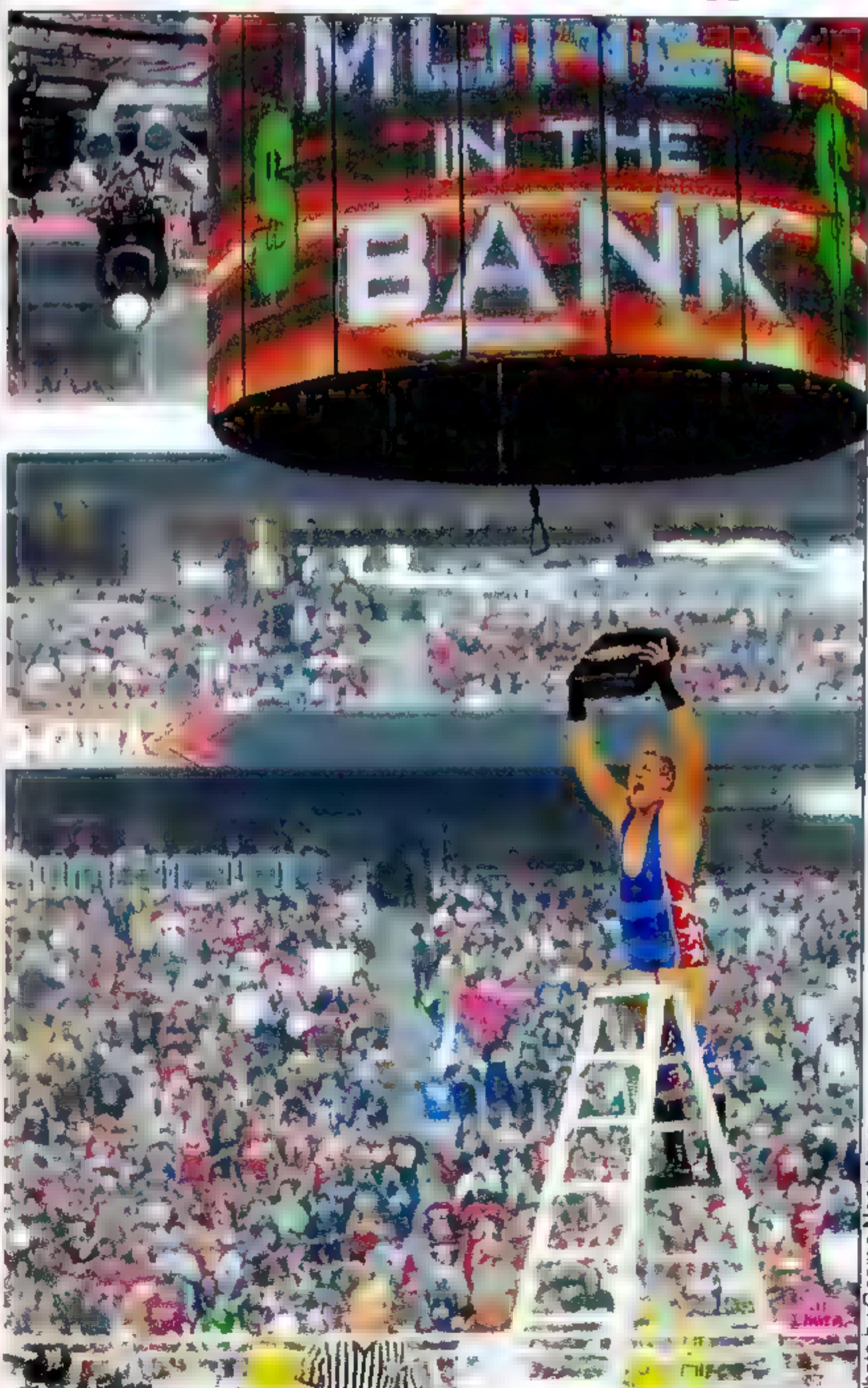


Photo by George Napolitano

Cold" Stunners handed out, with even old nemesis Mr. McMahon escaping Austin's wrath. "With two weeks to go to 'Mania, had to work within storylines. Couldn't give stunners to everyone, they have a huge PPV," Austin tweeted to explain his newfound mellow side.

He may not have been able to open up a can of whoopass, but Austin did manage to one-up his former employer one more time when he helped reveal that "The Hitman" had faked his leg injury for WrestleMania to bait Vince into signing for the match. It seems that you still can't trust a rattlesnake, even a retired one!

JACK SWAGGER WINS MONEY IN THE BANK, BECOMES WORLD CHAMP

Jack Swagger may have been on a losing streak prior to WrestleMania, but he managed to prove naysayers wrong at the biggest wrestling show of the

year, after (literally) climbing the WWE ladder to become the newest Money in the Bank winner. The Money in the Bank win presented Swagger with the right to one title match at any time of his choosing within the following year. Unlike previous victors, however, 28-year-old Swagger didn't wait long to cash in his winnings: He did it on the first episode of *Smackdown* following WrestleMania.

The show began with then-champion Chris Jericho gloating about successfully defending the World title against Edge at Wrestle-

Mania. This brought out Edge, who, taking exception to Jericho's words, delivered an impaler DDT and a spear to the champ. Already injured from the fearsome spear through the ringside barricade that he endured at WrestleMania, Jericho was easy pickings for the opportunistic Swagger. Swagger first took Edge out of the equation by blindsiding him to the back of the head with the MITB briefcase before ordering the bell to be rung. With Jericho still reeling from the Edge-inflicted assault, he was powerless to resist as Swagger picked him up in the gut-wrench power bomb, and brought him crashing down to the mat for the pin.

RVD MAKES AN IMPACTFUL RETURN ... SORT OF

The last time Rob Van Dam wrestled regularly on television, it was with WWE back in 2007. Since then, he has appeared in the ring just a handful of times, mainly because of his dislike for the non-stop travel, a case of professional burnout, and, most importantly, the health of his wife, Sonya. None of this, however, stopped fans from clamoring for the proper return of the man nicknamed the "Whole F'n Show."

On the March 8 episode of *Impact*, fans' wishes were finally granted, as the one-time "Mr. Monday Night" made his much-anticipated return to Monday night wrestling. Any fears that he might have been forgotten in his absence were quickly dispatched, as the crowd began chanting "R-V-D!" before his music even hit. Van Dam then made his way through the fans and nearly decapitated his opponent—a newly villainous Sting—with a scintillating kick off the top rope. Seconds later, RVD followed up with a trademark Rolling Thunder to score the shockingly quick pinfall victory.

The celebration was short-lived, however, as the "Stinger" attacked Van Dam immediately after the bell, beating him down with his baseball bat during a prolonged assault that threatened to undo a lot of the fervor RVD had whipped up inside the Impact Zone.

"The beatdown of RVD 20 seconds





RVD steamrolls into TNA



includes *Wrestling Observer Hall of Famers* Jumbo Tsuruta, Misuharu Misawa, and Toshiaki Kawada at the pinnacle of All Japan.

Despite being less experienced than previous champions, Hama's win opened the door for much-needed new headline stars in the popular Japanese promotion. With many of the current main-event talents old or worn down with injuries, the time was right for a legitimate new star to break through to the upper echelon of All Japan. And who more legitimate than a 450-pound former sumo wrestler who was trained by none other than All Japan President Keiji Muto?

into his debut in TNA was mind-boggling," said Chris Jericho, blasting TNA on his Twitter account following the show. "I don't understand how so many talented people can be so clueless."

RYOTA HAMA BECOMES AJPW TRIPLE CROWN CHAMPION

The impressive Ryota Hama continued his rapid ascension through the world of professional wrestling as he captured All Japan's prestigious Triple Crown championship on March 21—just 16 months, or 503 days, into his career. Facing off against champion Satoshi Kojima, Hama received an enthusiastic response from the fans in attendance as he brought home the victory by pinning Kojima to the mat for the three-count at Sumo Hall, the same arena where he had previously competed regularly as a sumo wrestler.

In winning the match, Hama—who was named Tokyo Sports Grand Prix Rookie of the Year and earned Tag Team of the Year honors for his tandem with fellow former sumo wrestler Akebono in 2009—became the 19th Triple Crown champion in history, adding his name to a list that

BRET HART FINALLY GETS REVENGE AGAINST VINCE McMAHON

It took Bret Hart 4,521 days following the infamous Montreal Screwjob to finally exact his revenge on the man who had famously done him wrong. In the seventh match of WrestleMania 26, "The Hitman" climbed into the ring to face Vince McMahon in a no-holds-barred streetfight.

At the ages of 64 and 52, respectively, and with Hart a stroke victim eight years earlier, no one was expecting a technical classic from Vince and Bret. With Hart eschewing the traditional black and pink for baggy shorts and a black T-shirt, it appeared he hadn't been preparing for one, either. What fans



Hama uses the Shining Wizard to dethrone Kojima

THE TIME WAS RIGHT FOR A LEGITIMATE NEW STAR TO BREAK THROUGH TO THE UPPER ECHELONS OF ALL JAPAN. AND WHO MORE LEGITIMATE THAN A 450-POUND FORMER SUMO WRESTLER WHO WAS TRAINED BY NONE OTHER THAN ALL JAPAN PRESIDENT KEIJI MUTO?



Photo by George Napolitano

Revenge is sweet when served with a crowbar

were expecting, though, was a satisfying payoff to the feud that had been brewing between the two since 1997. In that regard, fans went away disappointed.

Vince tried to score an 11th-hour advantage over his opponent by attempting to recruit the extended Hart family to side with him. But like the leg injury he had faked in the weeks leading up to WrestleMania, this too was a ruse on the part of "The Hitman." Instead, Hart and his family beat Vince unmercifully for 11 minutes before Bret finally applied his trademark Sharpshooter submission for the victory.

JOHN CENA PUTS DOWN "THE ANIMAL"

Going into WrestleMania 26, it seemed that John Cena may have finally met his match. Not only had Batista, aided by the conniving Mr. McMahon, come out on top in many of their pre-WrestleMania exchanges, but it also seemed that for the first time in his career, Cena may have doubted that he was physically or mentally up to the task of defeating his larger and more powerful foe. Fresh in the minds of both men was a previous clash at SummerSlam 2008, in which Cena suffered a herniated disc in his neck at

the hands of "The Animal."

Jealous of Cena's role as the "name and face of WWE" and having tasted blood before, this time Batista, the reigning WWE champion was looking to finish him off.

Putting aside any doubts, and looking to regain his beloved championship, Cena upped his game at WrestleMania and took the fight to Batista. "The Animal" dominated the first half of the match, but Cena evened the score with a suplex, and hit a giant Five-Knuckle Shuffle from the top rope. Batista wasn't done, however, and hit a ring-shaking Batista Bomb, from which somehow

Cena was able to get up. Shortly thereafter, Cena managed to execute his own finisher, the Attitude Adjuster, although he was unable to keep Batista down for the three-count.

Batista attempted one final Batista Bomb, but the quick-thinking Cena managed to counter it into an STF for the submission victory.

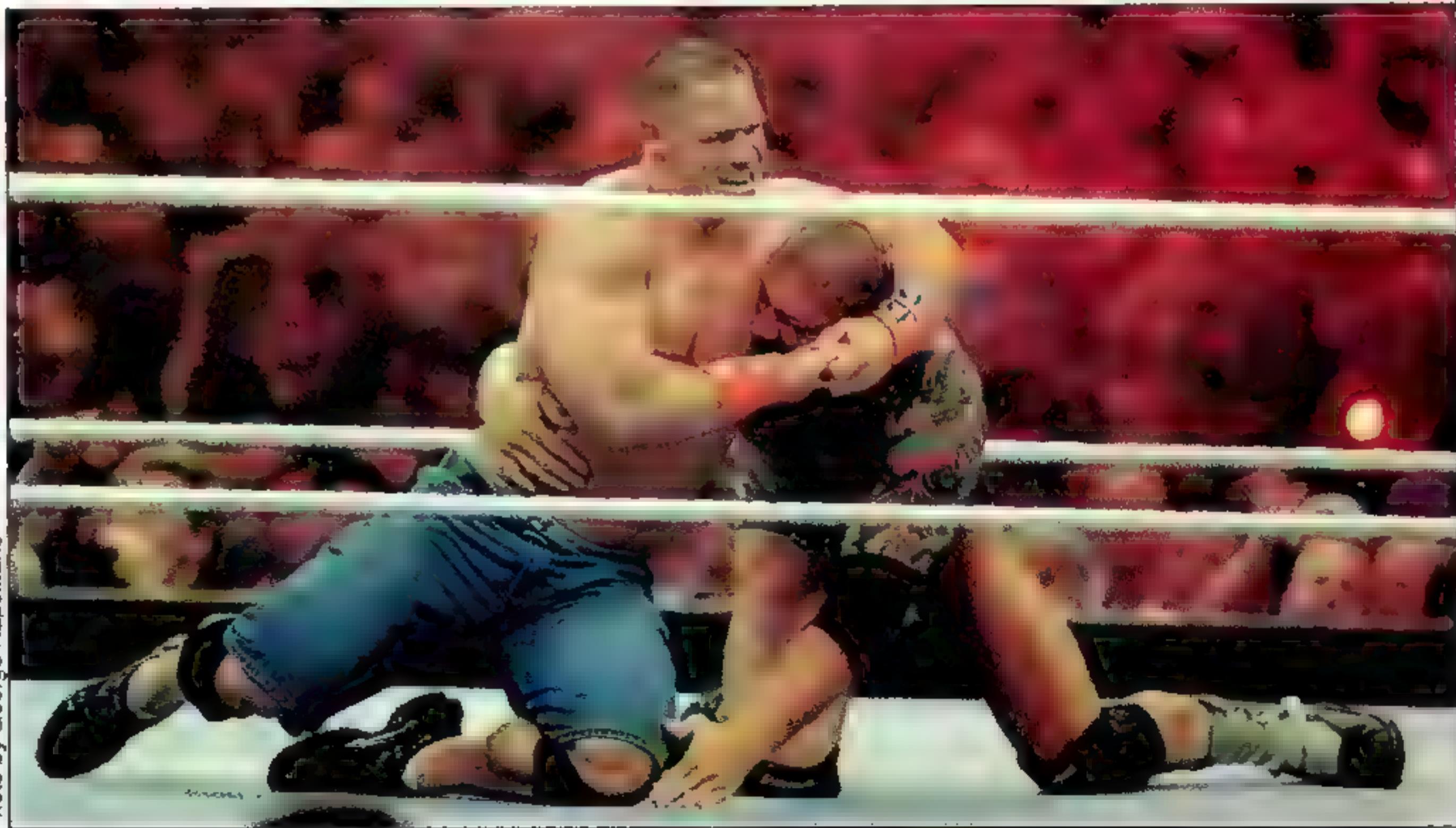
Not only had John Cena won perhaps his biggest WrestleMania challenge to date, but he became a nine-time world champion in the process.

WWE HALL OF FAME INDUCTS SEVEN LEGENDS

In the now traditional pre-WrestleMania Hall of Fame ceremony, seven faces from wrestling's yesteryear were inducted in a special show held at the Dodge Theater in Phoenix. Among the

WITH HIS HATRED OF CENA GIVING HIM THE STRENGTH TO CONTINUE, BATISTA ATTEMPTED ONE FINAL BATISTA BOMB, BUT THE QUICK-THINKING CENA MANAGED TO COUNTER IT INTO AN STF FOR THE SUBMISSION VICTORY.

Cena establishes his dominance over "The Animal"





Richter is proud to have helped pave the way

'I REALLY DIDN'T WANT TO WRESTLE, BUT I GOT INTO A SITUATION WITH TNA WHEN THE FANS ARE CHANTING "HOGAN! HOGAN!" AND IT'S HARD TO SAY NO.'

inductees were "Million-Dollar Man" Ted DiBiase Sr. (by his sons Brett and Ted), founder of New Japan Pro Wrestling Antonio Inoki (inducted by Stan Hansen), two-time WWF Women's champion Wendi Richter (inducted by Roddy Piper), five-time AWA World heavyweight champion Maurice "Mad Dog" Vachon (inducted by Pat Patterson), and baseball funny man Bob Uecker (inducted by Dick Ebersol).

Posthumously inducted were Stampede Wrestling founder Stu Hart (by his son Bret) and 1940s and '50s wrestling star Gorgeous George (by "The Destroyer" Dick Beyer).

As in previous years, the ceremony was an entertaining and nostalgic af-

fair, filled with great stories. "Mad Dog" Vachon told the audience how he got his nickname, after attacking an opponent, a referee, and a policeman all in the space of one match. Richter spoke about breaking into the business, how female wrestlers had to work "twice as hard for half the pay" and how she was honored to have paved the way for the female stars of today. Bret Hart spoke of his father Stu's legendary toughness but also of his sense of humor. Antonio Inoki talked about his first match 50 years prior, his famous MMA fight with Muhammad Ali, and said that he was proud to have helped develop professional wrestling and martial arts. Bob Uecker spoke warmly of Andre the

Giant, and Dick Beyer talked about working with Gorgeous George, a man who was as influential in the growth of the television medium as he was the sport of professional wrestling.

HULK HOGAN MAKES HIS RETURN TO THE RING

Coming three months after his "Hulkamania" tour of Australia, Hulk Hogan made his official in-ring return in North America on the March 8 edition of *Impact*, teaming with Abyss to battle Flair and his protégé, TNA World heavyweight champion AJ Styles. "Since I partnered with Dixie Carter and debuted on January 4, we have taken TNA to amazing new levels," Hogan said in a TNA release. "I've got a score to settle with Ric Flair, and there's no better time to do it than Monday night, March 8, when we change the wrestling world forever."

Elsewhere, however, the 56-year-old Hogan expressed doubts that he was physically able to perform in the ring anymore. "I really didn't want to wrestle, but I got into a situation with TNA when the fans are chanting 'Hogan! Hogan!' and it's hard to say no. I painted myself in a corner," he told *Riverfront Times*. "I did that to myself, but I really shouldn't be wrestling anymore."

As it happened, Hogan ended up



Just about now, Hogan is having second thoughts

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

having to wrestle not once, but twice on March 8, after Sting took to the ring in the first match and attacked Hogan and his tag team partner to cause a disqualification. In a rematch, held under no-holds-barred rules, the "Hulkster" helped score a win for himself and Abyss when he Irish-whipped Styles into Abyss, who connected with a fearsome Black Hole Slam for the pin.

IN OTHER NEWS ...

Mikel Mikel Scicluna and Angelo Poffo, father of Randy Savage and "Leaping" Lanny Poffo, passed away ... Former WWF World champion The

Iron Sheik was arrested after behaving belligerently on a flight ... Sean Waltman and Scott Hall won their tag team match at TNA's Destination X pay-per-view to earn contracts with the company ... Yoshi Tatsu won a 26-man battle royal prior to the televised portion of WrestleMania ... Awesome Kong, The Nasty Boys, and Consequences Creed were released by TNA ... Former WWE Diva Brooke Adams resurfaced on *Impact* as Eric Bischoff's personal assistant, "Ms. Tessmacher" ... Eddie Edwards was crowned ROH's first TV champion after defeating Davey Richards in the finals of an eight-man tournament.

BUSINESS STORY OF THE MONTH: WRESTLEMANIA TRIGGERS BIDDING FRENZY

When WWE refers to WrestleMania as the biggest event in sports-entertainment, it's not using hyperbole. WrestleMania is so big, in fact, that it generates approximately \$50-million for the host city (as well as a sizable amount for WWE)—as wrestling fans flood to the area for the event, and spend money booking hotel rooms, eating in restaurants, shopping, and buying tickets to local attractions like museums and theme parks.

It is estimated that 60 percent of wrestling fans attending WrestleMania come from outside the state (or even country) and stay in the area for at least three nights in order to enjoy all of the associated events, such as the Axxess fanfest and Hall of Fame induction ceremony.

In the buildup to WrestleMania 26 near Phoenix, 14 eager cities threw their names into the hat to be considered as the site for the next four WrestleManias. These included Miami, Los Angeles, New York, Detroit, Toronto, Tampa, Vancouver, and New Orleans.

In the months leading up to WrestleMania, host cities are displayed prominently on television, and recently the characteristics of host cities have been incorporated into the event logo. "It's like a four-hour infomercial," said Jeffrey Gaines, assistant general manager of Reliant Park, whose Reliant Stadium was the site of WrestleMania 25.

WRESTLER OF THE MONTH: THE UNDERTAKER

No doubt an argument can be made that Shawn Michaels was deserving of this honor. How do you deny a man whose incredible talents had again earned his way into history, with his seventh straight PWI Match of the Year?

The answer is really quite simple: The Undertaker won the match.

Looking back, it's easy to forget that Undertaker's victory over Michaels was only the culmination of his best month of the year. The Undertaker also beat Vince McMahon's "Chosen One," Intercontinental champion Drew McIntyre, on the March 19

edition of *Smackdown*. While both The Undertaker's half-brother Kane and Matt Hardy had previously beaten McIntyre, the losses had been expunged from the record books on the orders of McMahon. This time, there would be no controversy. The Undertaker scored a decisive pinfall victory after flattening McIntyre with a chokeslam and a Tombstone piledriver.

A week earlier, The Undertaker made a statement of his dominance as few can, manhandling four men—the tag teams Cryme Time and The Hart Dynasty—on the March 12 *Smackdown*.



Photo by George Napolitano

MATCH OF THE MONTH: SHAWN MICHAELS vs. THE UNDERTAKER

In a rematch of their 2009 classic, Shawn Michaels and The Undertaker went toe-to-toe at WrestleMania 26 for 24 scintillating minutes. Both men scored multiple near-falls before the "Dead Man" gained the advantage with a crashing Tombstone piledriver in the middle of the ring. Miraculously, Michaels managed to get a shoulder up to kick out of the pinfall attempt, and for a moment it appeared that The Undertaker may be feeling compassion—or at the very least doubt that he could get the job done—for the first time in his career. It wasn't to be, however. Shawn struggled to his feet and taunted his opponent by mimicking the "Dead Man's" own throat-slashing gesture. Michaels then egged The Undertaker on further, hitting him with a resounding slap, which prompted "The Phenom" to hoist Shawn up for one last jumping Tombstone to score the pinfall.

While the victory brought The Undertaker's WrestleMania streak to 18-0, the real story was the end of Michaels' career. As per the pre-match stipulation, HBK



Photo by George Napolitano

would have to retire if he was unable to win. Being the first WrestleMania since the show's 12th installment not to feature Jim Ross on commentary, it was up to Jerry Lawler to give voice to the thoughts of fans around the world as Michaels headed backstage following the bout. "Shawn, it's over. Goodbye. We will miss you," he said, as fans stood to applaud the career of a pro wrestling great, rightly described as "The Showstopper."

The following night on *Raw*, Michaels gave an emotional farewell speech, departing with the poignant signoff: "Shawn Michaels has left the building."

ODDBALL STORY OF THE MONTH: CHEECH AND CHONG GUEST HOST *RAW*

On March 1, four weeks before WrestleMania, *Raw* came close to going up in smoke as the classic 4:20-loving comedy duo Richard "Cheech" Marin and Tommy Chong guest hosted the show. Given WWE's PG policy, there was an obvious limit to how many overt references could be made to the exact means by which the pair became famous, but WWE still managed to put together some of the weirder segments seen on WWE television in a long time.

After being fed a box of Lucky Charms by the mischievous Hornswoggle, the guest hosts experienced an intense

sugar high, which ultimately led to Chavo Guerrero Jr., Primo, Carlito, Katie Lea, and Yoshi Tatsu appearing wearing fake moustaches and a chicken with the voice of Santino. Definitely a high point in WWE's year!

In an interview with *about.com*, Rob Van Dam, who shares more in common with Cheech and Chong than many members of the current WWE roster, said, "I'm a fan of Cheech and Chong, just like anyone that has enjoyed their movies. I don't know that a lot of the young kids are going to know who [they] are."

QUOTES OF THE MONTH

"I wish the TNA people all the luck in the world, because it means more of the boys have jobs and it gives fans an alternative ... I don't think anyone will ever come close to really giving true competition to WWE, because they're so far ahead of the game, they're rooted in their system, and they're a winner."

—Steve Austin, interviewed by Hardcore Sports radio

"Timing is everything. I think that show was made for me. I think I would have been on that list ... It's a

perfect scenario for these guys that they don't know what to do with. Just let them go on TV and be themselves. A little bit of me is like, *Man, what I could do with that.*"

—Former WWE wrestler Colt Cabana, discussing NXT with *The Sun* (U.K.)

"We are all convinced (as are most fans) that we proved definitively that we can produce a superior product. While it is going to take some time (and consistency) to gain the market share

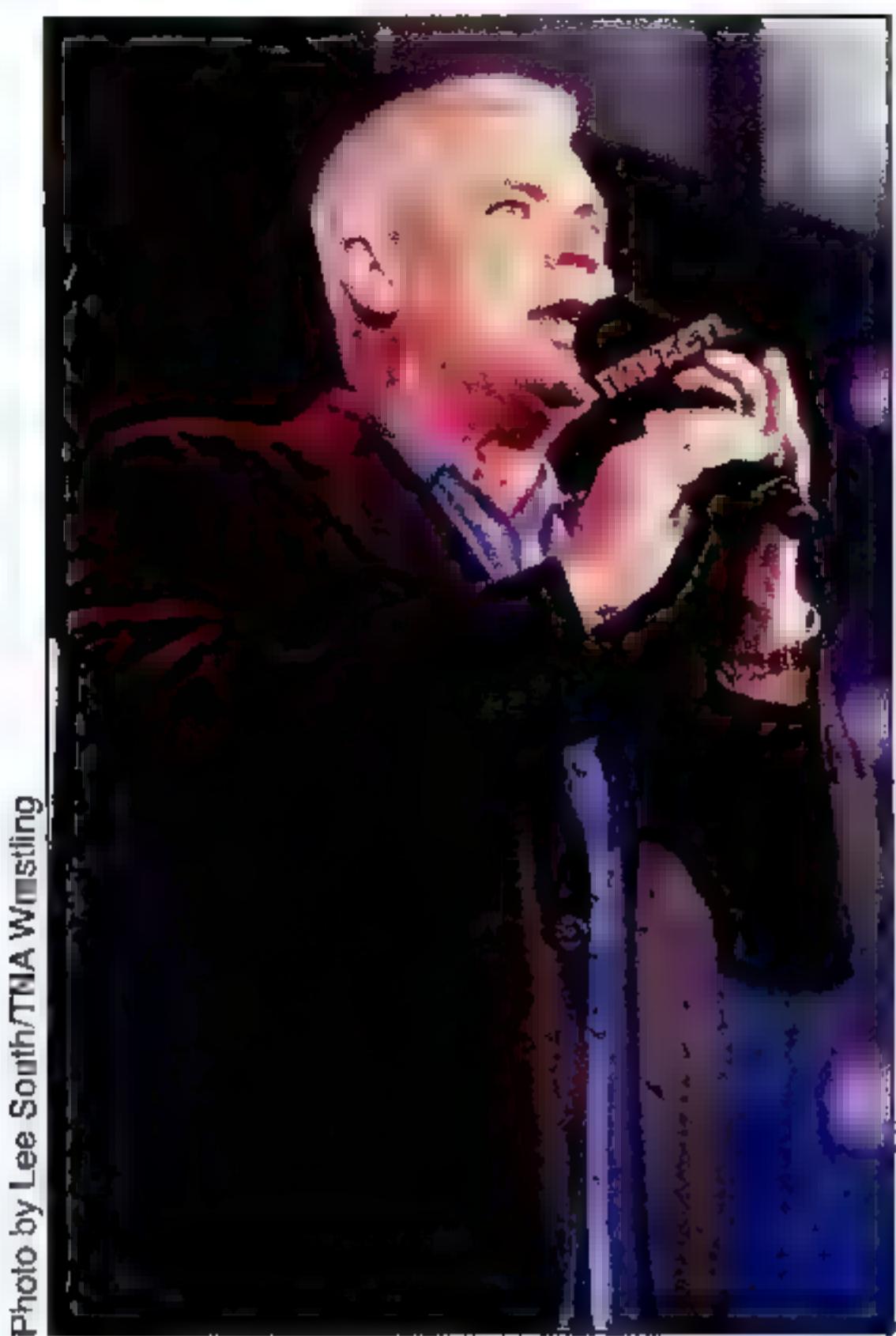


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

we hope to gain, we are thrilled with the product we presented, and are more than excited about the future."

—Eric Bischoff on Facebook, commenting on the March 8 *Impact*

"It was great seeing my pal, 'Stone-Cold,' last week on *Raw*. We talked for some time about our old WrestleMania 13 match and how

great it was. Steve looked terrific and was excited about his acting career ... I'll never forget [my WWE return], nor will I let you down next Sunday. WrestleMania, here I come!"

—Bret Hart on Facebook, commenting on the March 15 *Raw*

"It's nothing but a positive. I'll be quite honest with you, it's a company move that didn't need to be made. This is the entertainment industry, we're not organized athletics. But the WWE made a positive effort to look after its athletes and I'm very, very happy. It was the right move."

—John Cena, speaking about WWE's Wellness Policy with the U.K.'s Sky Sports

"I will be turning 45 in just a few months, and I can definitely see the end of the wrestling road coming. I'm really not sure when I'll be back in TNA, or even if, or for how long, so I really want to be prepared for life after wrestling."

—Mick Foley, commenting on his MySpace blog about the possibility of retiring (again)

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

WINNERS AND LOSERS

WINNERS

THE UNDERTAKER: Increased his streak to 18-0

SHAWN MICHAELS: Went out on a high note

JACK SWAGGER: Had reason to swagger after title win

JOHN CENA: Win over Batista proved he's the best

STING: Evil streak made him interesting again

LOSERS

AWESOME KONG: Former cornerstone of the Knockout division out in the cold

TNA: Rough start to new Monday Night War

BRET HART: 'Mania performance was lacking

ABYSS: Even Hulk couldn't help him win World title

CHRIS JERICHO: Struggled to get the job done

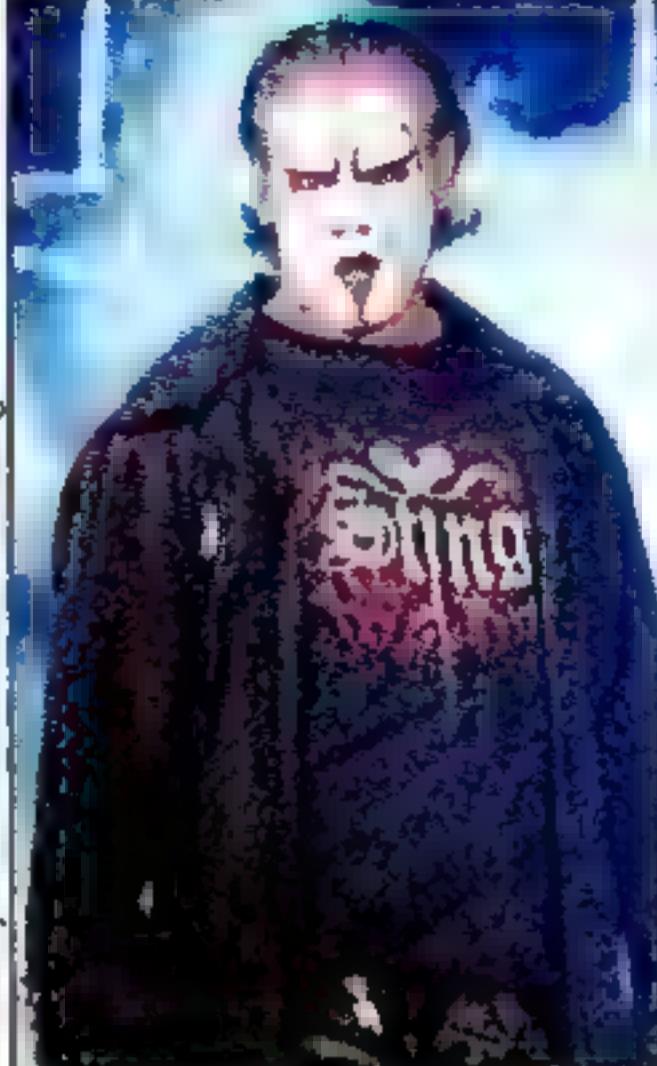


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

"I don't think that WWE is interested in putting me back on weekly TV and all the travel that comes along with it at this time. Would I love to work with 'King' again? Certainly. Is this my call? Nope. Do I think that I will ever be paired with Lawler again on a regular basis? Highly unlikely."

—Jim Ross, commenting on his blog, jrsbarbecue.com

"Not much of a Monday Night 'War.' *Raw* trounced TNA by 275% w/ total viewers. Also *Impact* much lower than the test Monday [episode] in early-Jan."

—Ted Linhart, USA Network's vice president of program research commenting on Twitter on the start of a new Monday Night War

"When [*Impact*] moved to Monday nights, they threw the kitchen sink at [WWE] and only did a fraction of our audience. It doesn't speak well for the type of product they're trying to present with the tawdry, blood-soaked action. I don't think that's what the culture wants these days."

—Vince McMahon, in an interview by Acorn-Online

"To be called tawdry from the King of Tawdry, that is some compliment!"

—TNA President Dixie Carter, responding to Vince McMahon's accusations via Twitter



RVD BOOSTED TNA'S CREDIBILITY

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

WRESTLEMANIA APRIL

COMPILED BY Al Castle

WITH THE BIGGEST event of the wrestling calendar in the rearview mirror, all three national U.S. promotions did their best to help fans recover from the WrestleMania hangover in April.

Several of WrestleMania's biggest feuds had enough gas in the tank to last at least another month. And, so, April's Extreme Rules pay-per-view event saw a heavyweight title rematch between John Cena and Batista, and other rematches between Chris Jericho and Edge, Sheamus and Triple-H, and CM Punk and Rey Mysterio Jr.

TNA did its part to get with the "extreme" theme with its annual Lockdown pay-per-view, at which all matches were contested inside a steel cage. The event made for some memorable, and some bizarre, moments.

But no moment was more memorable for TNA in April—and perhaps in all of 2010—than Rob Van Dam's World title victory on a live edition of *Impact*.

Ring of Honor, too, held a newsworthy pay-per-view in April. Big Bang, streamed live across the Internet, saw ROH's new champ making his first title defense, the return of a former star, and two stellar tag teams having a bona fide Match of the Year contender.

Sadly, April also saw the passing of two notable wrestling names. Former U.S. champion Chris Kanyon took his life after a long bout with depression. And former NWA and AWA World champion Gene Kiniski lost his battle with cancer.

ROB VAN DAM WINS TNA WORLD TITLE

The man who once dubbed himself "Mr. Monday Night" lived up to his name on April 19, when Rob Van Dam captured the TNA World championship in inspirational fashion on a live edition of *Impact* that was widely praised as one of the very best of 2010.

One night after helping lead Team Hogan to victory in a Lethal Lockdown match, Van Dam came out and challenged AJ Styles for his TNA World title. But Van Dam wasn't the only one anxious to get a crack at Styles. Fellow Team Hogan member Jeff Hardy, too, came out and staked his claim to a title shot.

TNA power broker Hulk Hogan entered the Impact Zone and testified to the importance of wearing world title gold. He went on to create this scenar-

Cheers and confetti rain down on the new champ



Photo by Bill O'Leary/TNA Wrestling

VAN DAM INTERCEPTED A SPRING- BOARDING STYLES, POWER- BOMBED HIM TO THE MAT, AND THEN CAME DOWN WITH ANOTHER FROG SPLASH FOR THE THREE-COUNT.

Kanyon took his life at 40 years old



Photo by Joe Zanolli

io: Rob Van Dam vs. Jeff Hardy, with the winner challenging Styles for his title in the night's main event.

Later that night, Van Dam and Hardy put their friendship aside and did battle for a shot at TNA's biggest prize. In the end, RVD avoided a Swanton bomb and connected with his Five Star Frog Splash for the victory.

But Van Dam was still only halfway to his ultimate goal. In the final match of the night, the already exhausted Van Dam took the fight to the "Phenomenal One." After about eight minutes of action, Van Dam intercepted a springboarding Styles, powerbombed him to the mat, and then came down with another frog splash for the three-count.

As confetti rained down on the Impact Zone, RVD celebrated his title win with much of the TNA roster, as well as Hogan and TNA President Dixie Carter.

CHRIS KANYON DEAD AT 40

Chris "Kanyon" Klucaris, whose unique wrestling style earned him the moniker "The Innovator Of Offense," was found dead in his Queens, New York, home on April 3 from an apparent suicide. The multiple-time WCW and WWE tag team champion and one-time U.S. champion was just 40.

Kanyon spent his formative years as a wrestler in WCW, where he and Mark Starr teamed as Men at Work in 1995. He began turning heads in 1997 when he donned a mask as the macabre Mortis in a feud against Glacier.

Through his unique wrestling style, which included several moves never seen by most fans, Kanyon climbed through the ranks of WCW. As a member of the Jersey Triad, Kanyon shared tag

team gold with Chris Candido and Bam Bam Bigelow. He also teamed with and feuded against Dallas Page in 2000.

Kanyon made the jump to WWE when it bought WCW in 2001. Kanyon, who was awarded the U.S. championship when Booker T forfeited the title, played an integral role in the WCW/ECW Alliance invasion angle, but was later relegated to a lower-card role player.

Kanyon semi-retired from the sport in 2004, but still occasionally competed in the ring, including a brief stint in TNA in 2005. In 2006, Kanyon made headlines by coming out of the closet and proclaiming himself the sport's first openly gay wrestler.

Despite his successes, Kanyon battled depression and bipolar disorder for years. He died of an apparent overdose of pills.

BIG SHOW, EDGE, JERICHO SHIFTED IN WWE DRAFT

WWE's annual version of musical chairs took place on April 26, when the company held its annual draft.

The event took place at a special three-hour live *Monday Night Raw*, where wrestlers from Raw took on those from Smackdown, with the winner getting a draft pick for his brand. A supplemental draft was held the next day and announced on wwe.com.

As is usually the case, the draft saw each brand get an even number of picks. Leaving Raw to join Smackdown were Kelly Kelly, Christian, Kofi Kingston, and The Big Show, who was drafted away from his home brand for the second straight year.

Coming to Raw from Smackdown were John Morrison, R-Truth, Edge, and Chris Jericho, who was also shifted for the second year in a row.

The supplemental draft saw many other talents jump brands, including Cody Rhodes going to Smackdown and The Hart Dynasty coming to Raw.

The draft may not have been the most newsworthy since WWE first split its roster in 2002, but it did create some fresh new matchups and also freshened up some stale acts.

The Big Show immediately became



AYUMI KURIHARA

VS.
TOMOKA NAKAGAWA

SHIMMER, Volume 29, April 10, 2010

Photo by George Takinos

KINISKI'S GRAVELLY VOICE AND HARDENED FEATURES MADE HIM A NATURAL WRESTLING VILLAIN AND ONE OF THE TOP ATTRACTIONS IN EVERY TERRITORY HE VISITED.

Former gridiron star Kiniski won AWA and NWA World titles



Photo by Bob Verini

the top challenger to Jack Swagger's World title on Smackdown. Kofi Kingston also got the opportunity to contend for and win the Intercontinental title on Smackdown. And Edge and Jericho both got into the WWE heavyweight title mix on Raw.

FORMER NWA, AWA WORLD CHAMP KINISKI DEAD AT 81

Wrestling legend Gene Kiniski, who dominated the sport in the 1950s and '60s, died in his Blaine, Washington, home on April 14 from cancer. The man who made a solid argument for being "Canada's Greatest Athlete" was 81.

Kiniski grew up in Edmonton, Alberta, where he played college football before being recruited to become a professional wrestler in the early-1950s. After training under Dory Funk Sr., Kiniski began wrestling in Arizona, California, Texas, and New Mexico. Kiniski's gravelly voice and hardened features made him a natural wrestling villain and one of the top attractions in every territory he visited.

He came into Minnesota's AWA in 1960 and within a year unseated Verne Gagne to capture his first world title. He also had a stint in the World Wide Wrestling Federation (now known as WWE), where he feuded with heavy-

weight champ Bruno Sammartino.

In 1966, Kiniski reached his career pinnacle when he beat the great Lou Thesz to capture the NWA World heavyweight title before more than 11,000 fans at the Kiel Auditorium in St. Louis.

The sinister Kiniski turned back the challenges of many a fan favorite before finally losing the championship in 1969.

Ironically, it was Dory Funk Jr. who took the belt from him.

In the 1970s and '80s, Kiniski remained active in the sport as a promoter, occasional competitor, and even as a referee. He was inducted into the *Wrestling Observer Hall of Fame* in 1996.

SOME EXTREME MOMENTS AT "EXTREME RULES"

One month after many of wrestling's biggest matches were fought at WrestleMania 26, WWE's Extreme Rules played host to a number of rematches with hardcore stipulations tossed in.

In the night's main event, John Cena defended his WWE championship against the man he defeated for the title a month earlier, Batista. The rematch was contested under last-man-standing rules, which dictated that either man would lose if he could not get on his feet by a 10-count.

After an exhausting 24-minute battle, Cena took advantage of the unique stipulation and used duct tape to bind Batista's feet to a ringpost. Unable to right himself at the ref's count of 10, Batista was the loser.

Also at Extreme Rules, Sheamus sought to avenge his WrestleMania loss to Triple-H. And did he ever. "The Celtic Warrior" attacked Triple-H backstage with a lead pipe before their streetfight could even begin. When their match finally took place later in the card, Sheamus all but dominated Triple-H, and pinned him after four bicycle kicks to the face. Triple-H would not compete again for several months.

Other WrestleMania rematches included CM Punk defeating Rey Mysterio Jr. in a match in which Punk's hair was on the line, and Edge beating Chris Jericho in a cage match.

Also on the card, newly turned fan favorite Randy Orton challenged Jack Swagger for his World championship in a no-disqualification contest. Orton seemed on pace to winning the match when Swagger reversed an attempted RKO and dumped Orton onto a steel chair. That allowed the champion to hit his gut wrench power bomb for the win.





Hogan locks down on Flair's throat

THE WILD MATCH FEATURED STING ATTACKING TEAM HOGAN MEMBERS WITH A BASEBALL BAT, HOGAN KNOCKING OUT FLAIR WITH A PAIR OF BRASS KNUCKLES, AND HARDY DIVING OFF A LADDER ON TOP OF THE CAGE ONTO ROBERT ROODE AS HE LAY ON A TABLE.

CAGED CARNAGE AT TNA LOCKDOWN

The 2010 edition of TNA's annual all-cage match pay-per-view, Lockdown, delivered on its reputation for being one of the biggest spectacles of the wrestling year.

The main event of the April 18 event saw another chapter written in one of wrestling's oldest rivalries—that between Hulk Hogan and Ric Flair. In a Lethal Lockdown match, Team Hogan, which was comprised of Abyss, Jeff Jarrett, Jeff Hardy, and Rob Van Dam, took on Team Flair, which included Beer Money Inc., Desmond Wolfe, and Sting.

The wild match featured Sting attacking Team Hogan members with a baseball bat, Hogan knocking out Flair with a pair of brass knuckles, and Hardy diving off a ladder on top of the cage onto Robert Roode as he lay on a table. In the end, Abyss delivered his Black Hole Slam to Wolfe for the three-count.

Also on the show, AJ Styles retained his TNA World title by defeating "Pope" D'Angelo Dinero in a cage. Styles got the win after stabbing Dinero in the eye with a

pen he took from a ringside cameraman.

Elsewhere on the card, two legendary teams did battle when Team 3-D defeated Scott Hall and Kevin Nash. The Beautiful People took on Angelina Love and Tara in a match where all of TNA's women's championships were on the line. Rayne became Knockouts champ by pinning Tara.

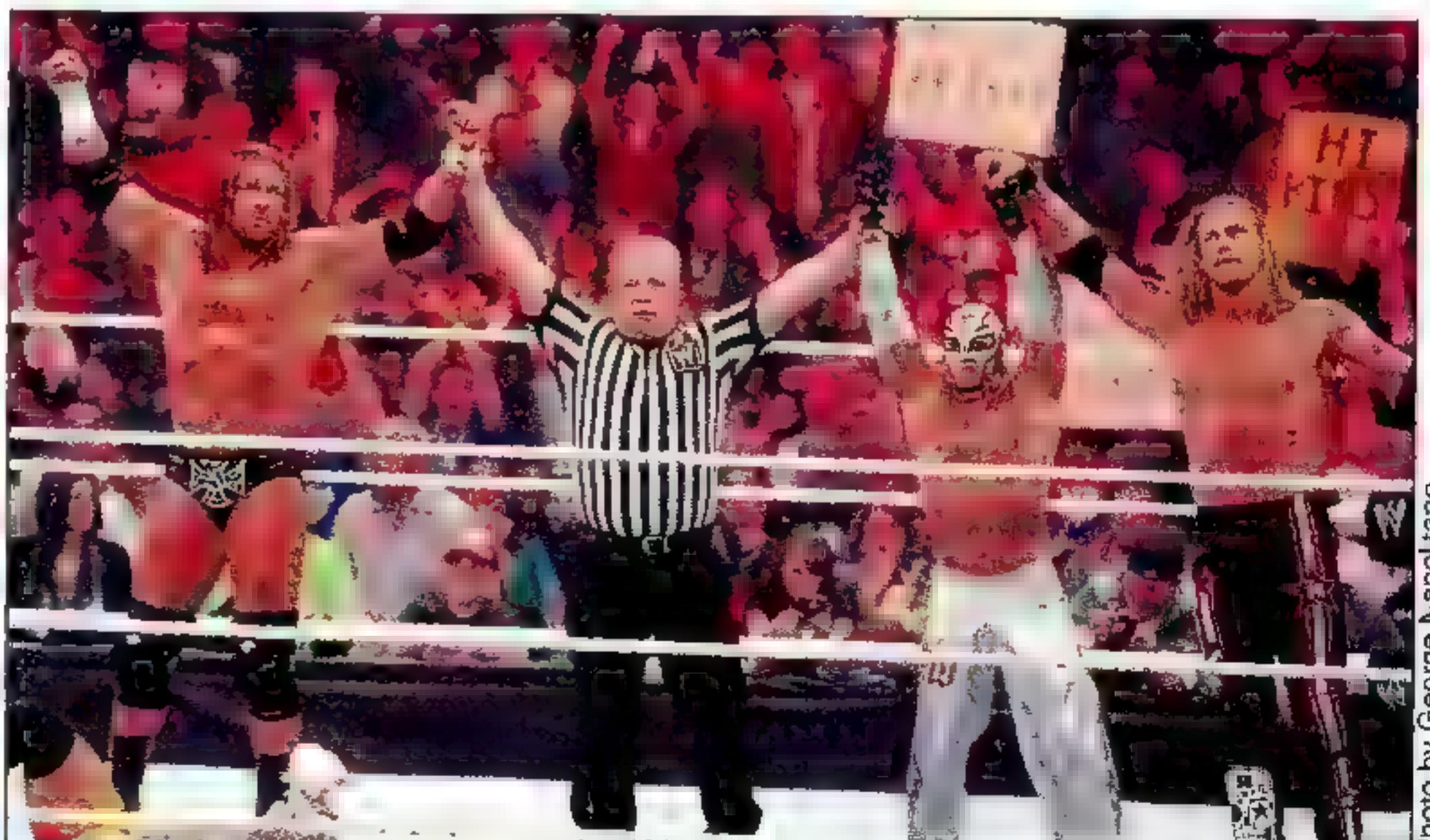
Kazarian won the vacant X division title in a three-way match that included Homicide and Shannon Moore. Finally, Kurt Angle defeated Ken Anderson in a thrilling and exhausting grudge match. (For more, check out "Match Of The Month.")

WWE CREW STUCK IN EUROPE AMID VOLCANO TROUBLE

What was powerful enough to take out WWE's entire roster for several days and leave a live *Monday Night Raw* without most of its stars? The answer: Eyjafjallajokull!

No, that wasn't the name of a dominant new faction that took over WWE, but rather that of the Icelandic volcano that erupted in April, disrupting most air travel in and out of Europe at the same time the WWE crews were on an overseas tour.

Winds blew thick clouds of ash from the volcano over the Atlantic Ocean, paralyzing many airports in Europe. Because planes were grounded, WWE's Raw and Smackdown crews scrambled by bus, train, and ferry to make their European dates. Still, a pair of shows in Austria and Turkey



Triple-H, Mysterio, & Edge: an odd trio caused by very odd circumstances

had to be rescheduled.

Although the volcano erupted on April 14, its aftermath impacted WWE's schedule for more than a week, and even made for a highly unusual edition of *Monday Night Raw* on April 20.

With the Raw crew stuck in Ireland, WWE was forced to fill out Raw using mostly stars from the Smackdown brand, which made it back to the States the previous day. The only top Raw name available for the show was Triple-H, who did not take part in the European tour because he was filming a movie. And so Raw's unusual main event featured Triple-H teaming with Rey Mysterio Jr. and Edge to take on CM Punk, Luke Gallows, and Chris Jericho.

WWE's Raw crew finally returned to the U.S. with just a couple days to spare before Extreme Rules.

CORNETTE THREATENS RUSSO, FACES LEGAL RAMIFICATIONS

One of wrestling's most volatile rivalries in April involved two office workers in their late-40s.

Ring of Honor Executive Producer Jim Cornette published on his personal website on April 14 the contents of an explosive e-mail he sent to TNA producer Terry Taylor. In the e-mail, Cornette touched on his "hate" for TNA creative head Vince Russo and went as far as to say, "I want Vince Russo to die."

"If I could figure out a way to murder him without going to prison, I would consider it the greatest accomplishment of my life," Cornette wrote.

So alarmed by Cornette's words were TNA officials that they forwarded his e-mail to company attorneys, who responded to Cornette in a letter. The lawyers called Cornette's e-mail "a terroristic threat" and said they had forwarded it to the proper state and federal law enforcement agencies.

"Any further threats to contact Vince Russo or any other TNA personnel (directly or indirectly) shall be viewed as acts in furtherance of such threats and shall be pursued and prosecuted accordingly," the attorneys said in the letter, which Cornette also published.

Cornette's disdain for Russo dates

back to when both were working for TNA. Cornette, a wrestling traditionalist with a proven track record for booking in several promotions, including WWE, frequently clashed with Russo, who is known for his frenetic storyline pacing and reliance on shock value.

"It's amazing what kind of response a little personal e-mail between two old friends can generate from some people, isn't it?"

Cornette wrote on his website.

"BIG BANG" A NIGHT OF FIRSTS FOR ROH

Much like the historical event it was named after, Ring of Honor's The Big Bang event may have marked the beginning of an important new era.

The April 3 event featured many firsts for ROH. For one, it was ROH's first glitch-free Internet pay-per-view event. ROH's inaugural iPPV, December 2009's Final Battle, was plagued with technical problems, including no audio from one ringside commentator. At The Big Bang, the announce team, which included former *Monday Night Raw* play-by-play man Kevin Kelly, sounded great, and the show went off without any problems whatsoever.

The event also marked the first time ROH held an event in Charlotte, North Carolina. And it was the first time it promoted a major event featuring Mexican lucha libre stars. The show's co-main event was a tag team bout pitting Blue Demon Jr. and Magno against Super Parka and Misterioso.

In the other main slot, newly crowned ROH champion Tyler Black made his first title defense, defeating



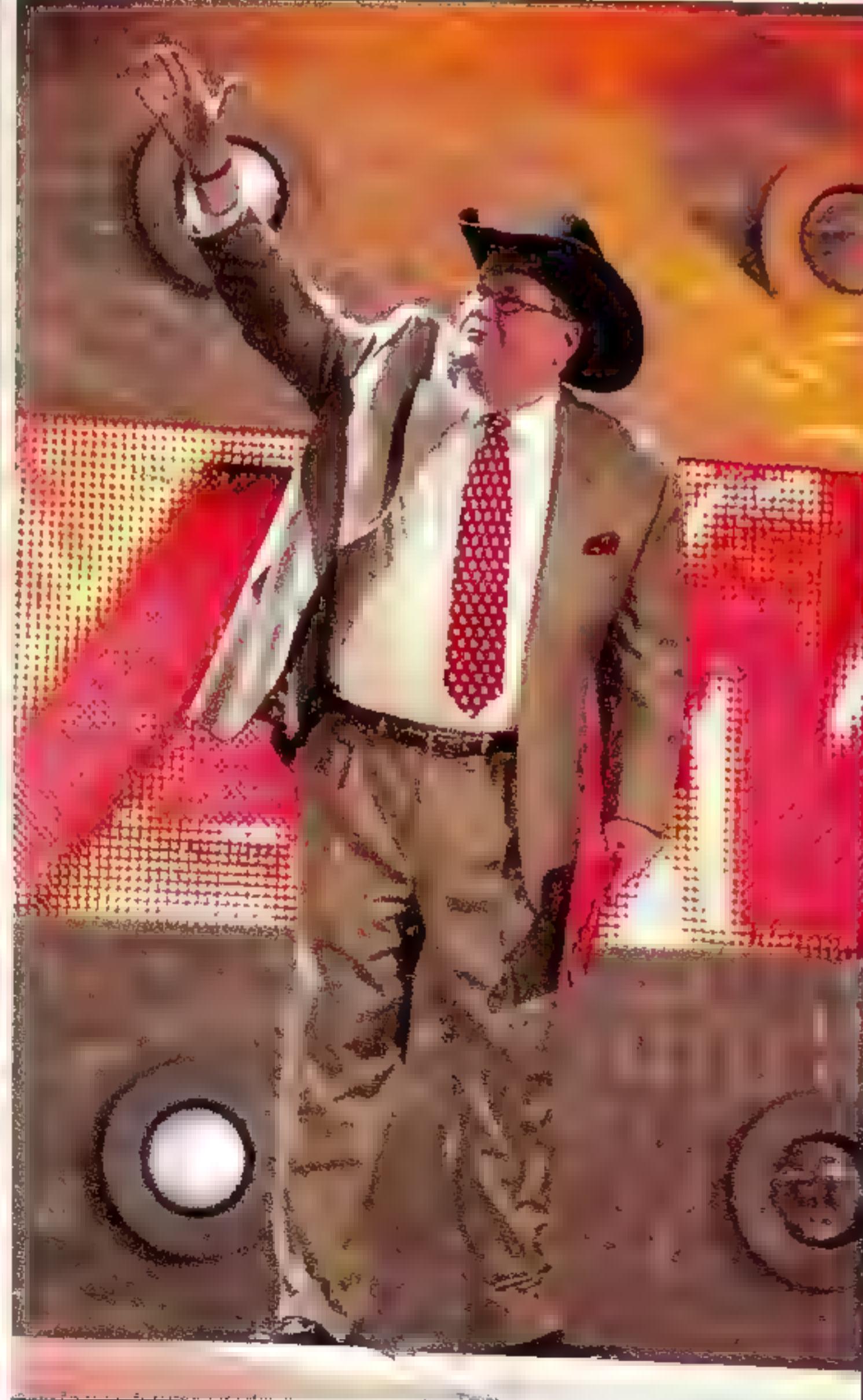
Photo by Lee Soutby/TNA Wrestling

Cornette played a sour note in Russo's ears

IN THE E-MAIL, CORNETTE TOUCHED ON HIS 'HATE' FOR TNA CREATIVE HEAD VINCE RUSSO AND WENT AS FAR AS TO SAY, 'I WANT VINCE RUSSO TO DIE'

'I'VE HAD A BLESSED AND AMAZING CAREER FULL OF UNBELIEVABLE EXPERIENCES,' ROSS WROTE ON HIS BLOG AFTER HIS CONTRACT EXPIRED. 'THIS WEEK IS MEMORABLE FOR WHAT HASN'T HAPPENED. A BLESSING IN DISGUISE!'

J.R.'s future unclear



Roderick Strong and former champ Austin Aries in a three-way contest.

The show also delivered what many ROH fans would consider its first viable 2010 Match of the Year candidate when The Kings of Wrestling, Claudio Castagnoli and Chris Hero, defeated Jay and Mark Briscoe to capture the ROH tag team championship.

The event also saw the first time that former tag team partners and best friends El Generico and Kevin Steen squared off since splitting in December, and the first appearance of "The Fallen Angel" Christopher Daniels in ROH since leaving the company in 2007.

WRESTLING'S HOTTEST FREE AGENT: JIM ROSS

The future of arguably the greatest announcer ever to call a wrestling match was watched closely by wrestling fans in April, as Jim Ross' talent contract with WWE was set to expire at the end of the month.

As it came down to the wire, Ross regularly updated fans on his Internet blog about the various career options

he was considering. Ross reportedly met in April with TNA President Dixie Carter and her father, Bob Carter, who owns TNA's parent company, Panda Energy. Ross also reportedly had discussions with the Mark Cuban-owned cable network, HDNet, about announcing mixed martial arts events on the channel, which was also the home of Ring of Honor's weekly program.

Nothing came of either of those meetings, and even during the 11th hour, fans held out hope that Ross would come to terms with his long-time employer, WWE, to return to the announce desk. Ross had last worked as a play-by-plan man on *Smackdown* until suffering from another bout of Bell's palsy in October 2009.

In the end, the deadline for Ross to renew his contract came and went with little fanfare, and few answers. Although Ross was not offered a deal to return to the announce table, he remained employed by WWE in an administrative capacity.

"I've had a blessed and amazing career full of unbelievable experiences," Ross wrote on his blog after his contract expired. "This week is memorable for what hasn't happened. A blessing in disguise?"

IN OTHER NEWS ...

WWE released several talents, including Mickie James, Shelton Benjamin, Katie Lea Burchill, Jimmy Wang Yang, Slam Master J (Ray Gordy), Funaki, and Mike Knox ... The Hart Dynasty defeated The Miz and Big Show to capture the Unified WWE tag team championship ... Angelina Love captured the Knockouts championship by winning a key to a box containing the title in an eight-woman match on *Impact* ... TNA stripped Douglas Williams of the X division title for being unable to fly from the U.K. to the U.S. to defend his title due to the Icelandic volcano ... Ric Flair lost to Abyss in Flair's first singles match on U.S. soil



Madison Eagles admires her new hardware

Photo by George Iahinos

since "retiring" in 2008. As a stipulation of the match, Flair also lost his WWE Hall of Fame ring ... Eve Torres defeated Maryse in London, England, to win the Divas championship ... TNA unveiled a rankings system that incorporated wrestlers' win/loss record, past success, and fan voting ... Jeff Hardy's face was burned when James Storm spit a fireball at him ... Ezekiel Jackson suffered a knee injury that would sideline him for six months ...

The pilot episode of *TNA Reaction* aired ... Texas Stadium, which hosted several major wrestling events, including Kerry Von Erich's 1984 NWA World title win over Ric Flair, was demolished ... Mark Henry was arrested for throwing a drink at a fan in Ireland ... *TNA Impact* on Monday nights saw ratings dip to an alarming 0.5 ... Madison Eagles ended MsChif's nearly two-year reign as SHIMMER champion.

BUSINESS STORY OF THE MONTH: SMACKDOWN MOVING TO SYFY

If you were one of the last people in the U.S. still without cable or satellite television, WWE gave you one more reason to get hooked up in April, when it announced that *Smackdown* was moving to the Syfy network.

Since 1999, *Smackdown* had aired on free, broadcast TV—first on the now-defunct UPN, then on the CW, and most recently on MyNetwork TV. But when cable network Syfy offered WWE about \$10-million more in programming fees than MyNetwork, WWE decided to move its blue brand to a new home, even though it was available in about 13 million fewer homes. The last *Friday Night*

Smackdown on free television would air in October.

The move to Syfy made sense for other reasons. Syfy is owned by NBC Universal, which also owns the USA network, the longtime home of *Monday Night Raw*. As well, Syfy had already been airing WWE programming since 2006, when ECW began its four year-run on the network.

The beginning of a new chapter in WWE programming also meant the end of another one. To make room for *Smackdown* on its schedule, Syfy dumped *WWE NXT*, which would be moved to wwe.com in October.

WRESTLER OF THE MONTH: ROB VAN DAM

Call him "RVD," "The Whole F'n Show," or "Mr. Monday Night." In April, TNA fans called Rob Van Dam one thing: their savior.

Struggling to keep its head above water in its new live, Monday night time slot, and failing to capture the minds of fans since the new Hulk Hogan/Eric Bischoff regime took power in July, TNA got a glimmer of hope in April when Rob Van Dam captured the company's World title.

A longtime star in the sport who held heavyweight titles in ECW and WWE, Van Dam returned to TNA in March after taking a more than two-year hiatus from full-time competition.

Van Dam's time away did nothing to diminish his popularity, or his

ring ability. But in a company overflowing with new main-event names, including Jeff Hardy and Mr. Anderson, some wondered how far Van Dam could go in his new home.

All doubt was removed on April 19, when Van Dam beat Hardy to become number-one contender to the TNA World title, and later that night beat Styles to win the title.

The emotional in-ring celebration was one of the lasting images of TNA's year.

With his victory, Van Dam may have done more to give TNA fans a sense of hope in the company's future than Hogan, Bischoff, and Dixie Carter combined. In Van Dam, TNA now had a well-known and well-respected new World champion, and a fresh start.



Photo by Bill O'Boyle/TNA Wrestling

MATCH OF THE MONTH: KURT ANGLE vs. MR. ANDERSON

Wrestling traditionalists have argued that the problem with TNA's annual Lockdown event is that when every match on the card is contested in a cage, it's hard for any single match to stand out.

In 2010, Kurt Angle and Mr. Anderson did their best to dispel that theory with an epic steel cage match that outshined every other match on the show, and any other match in all of the sport in April.

During a 21-minute war, both men bled each other with the steel mesh and with the chain that held the key to the cage. Angle connected with a moonsault from the top of the cage, and had Anderson tapping out to his anklelock. But the match could not end until one of them reached the arena floor.

In the end, Angle choked out Anderson with the "warrior medal" that Angle was gifted by an American troop, stomped and spit on Anderson, and walked out of the cage to victory.

After the match, an emotional Angle told fans he would be taking some time off, but would come back soon with a singular goal: recapturing the TNA World title.



Photo by Lee Soutar/TNA Wrestling

ODDBALL STORY OF THE MONTH: DIVAS FAN GOES TOO FAR

Several wrestling fans were upset when they learned in April that popular WWE Diva Mickie James had been fired from the company. But perhaps none took the news harder than Brooklyn, New York, resident Zavr Peygumbari.

Police arrested Peygumbari, 22, on April 30 after the fan allegedly threatened to kill a WWE employee in one of more than 20 calls he placed to the company's Stamford, Connecticut, headquarters.

So incensed was Peygumbari over the termination of the five-time WWE Women's champion that he even vowed to blow up the office building and to also visit the building armed with a machete and machine gun, police said.

When he appeared before a judge to face harassment charges, Peygumbari apologized for his behavior. His lawyer called him a "fervent wrestling fan" who was not serious about his threats. According to reports, police were familiar with Peygumbari and knew him to be emotionally disturbed.

James acknowledged her overzealous fan in an interview with *Busted Open Radio*, saying she was glad he did not follow through with his threats, especially considering



she still had friends working in WWE's corporate offices.

"I appreciate him being a fan and everything else, but that is a little much," James said. "Anger never solves anything."

According to the *Connecticut Post*, when told by the judge that a condition of his release was that he stay away from all WWE employees, Peygumbari replied, "I'm not allowed to go to wrestling shows?"



Photo by Duane Long

QUOTES OF THE MONTH

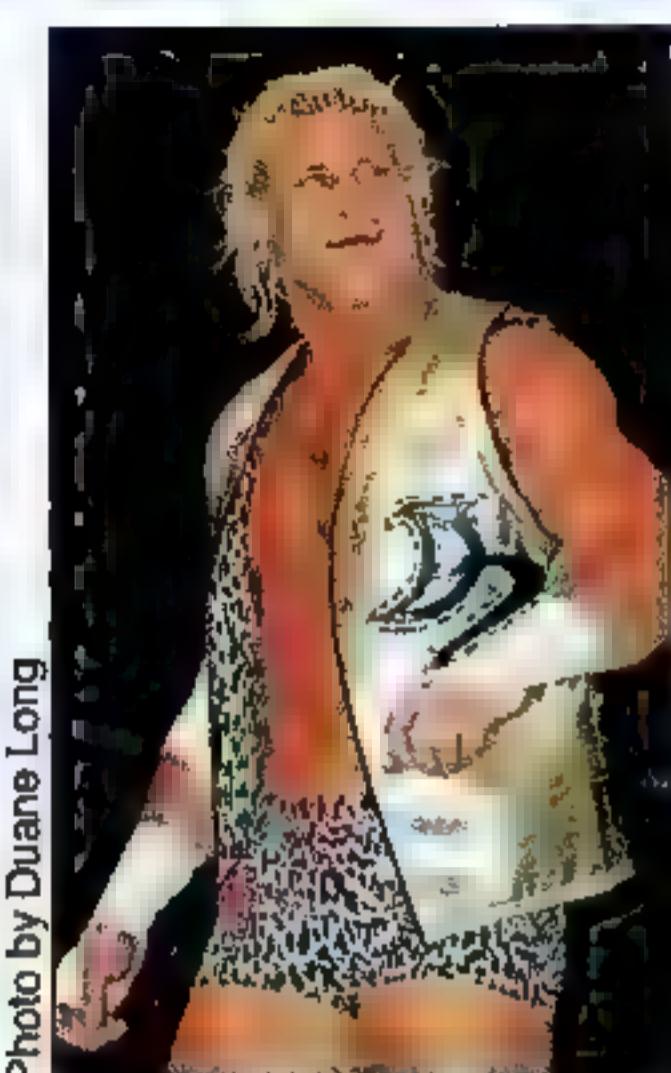


Photo by Duane Long

“It still doesn’t seem like [Shawn Michaels] is gone. WWE has lost the greatest Superstar ever, and a lot of guys, including me, have lost a great mind.”

—Dolph Ziggler, on HBK’s retirement in a WWE Twitter interview

“There is a difference in someone who is passionate about TNA and wants to see something different versus someone who just hates the product and they want to complain. Hearing what fans like is the best feedback for me because we can strive to do more of it.”

—TNA President Dixie Carter, responding to fans at tnawrestling.com

“He was unique [that’s] for sure, we’d just texted a li’l bit last week and he spoke again of his ups and downs with depression. That is a tough struggle! But at least his struggles are over. He was a nutcase, good and bad, but I’ll miss him nonetheless. R.I.P., my friend.”

—Gregory Helms, blogging about the death of Chris Kanyon

“That’s not good for business, and that’s not good for families and friends in general. Hopefully ... safety in the business becomes more of a trend, because I know over the last decade, some of that caution has been thrown to the wind a little bit, as far as head drops and chair shots and guys taking care of each other. So, hopefully, we can get back to that and we can have longer, healthier careers.”

—ROH champion Tyler Black, discussing dangerous moves with *Newsday*'s Alfonso Castillo

“I speak my mind, but it was a very different place from when I got there. With those changes and with changes that weren’t happening on the monetary side, I would say that it was time to dial back a bit and figure out exactly what I wanted out of wrestling in general ... Kong, my character, wasn’t as vicious or as relevant as she was before.”

—The former Awesome Kong, discussing her parting of ways with TNA in an interview with divadirt.com

“Don’t suck up to me because you know I’m the only one here.”

WINNERS AND LOSERS

WINNERS

TYLER BLACK: Two pinfalls in first ROH title defense—not bad for the new kid

HULK HOGAN: Lead Team Hogan to victory, without even wrestling in the match

JACK SWAGGER: Pinning Orton gave new champ a reason to swagger

CM PUNK: Beat Mysterio to keep his hair ... for another month

SHEAMUS: Put “The Game” on the shelf for several months

LOSERS

MARYSE: *Il y va votre ceinture* (French for: There goes your belt)

JIM CORNETTE: We get not liking Russo, but this is ridiculous

MICKIE JAMES: Oh, Mickie, you’re so fired

JOHN CENA: We can see how lame your Last Man Standing win was

SHELTON BENJAMIN: We guess there was some “stopping you now”

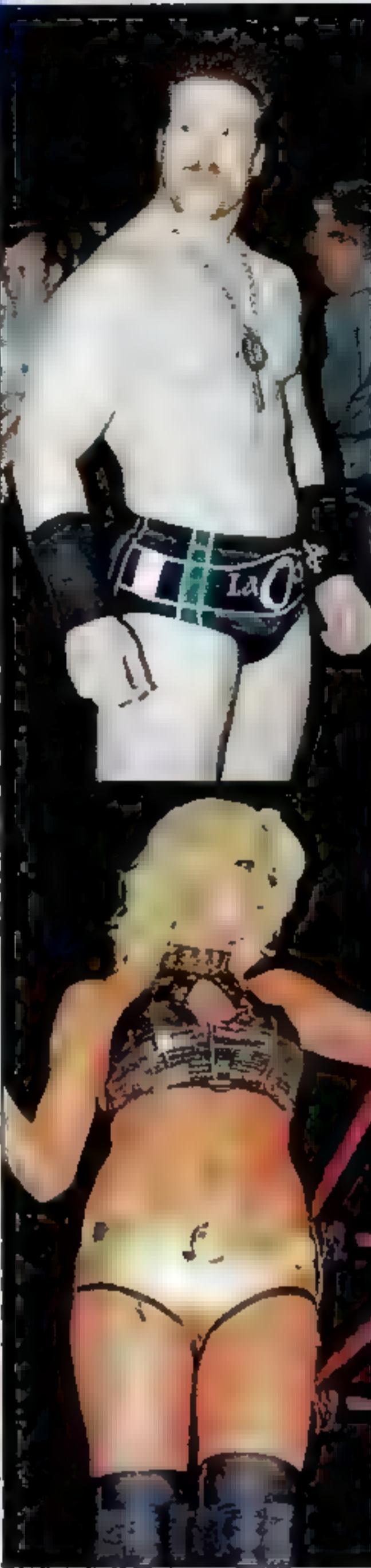


Photo by George Napolitano

Photo by Siu Saks

—Triple-H on the April 19 edition of *Monday Night Raw*, acknowledging the absence of the rest of the Raw crew, which was stuck in Ireland

“We ended up going from Friday night to Sunday morning when we got back, so it was like 54 hours straight without a bed, all just to make our show here in New Jersey. It was quite an ordeal and it definitely tested whether or not you wanted to be in the business.”

—World champion Jack Swagger, describing a harrowing week on the road with WWE in an interview with Brian Fritz of *fanhouse.com*

“When you go into the ring, I want to see some wrestling holds, not just meat chopping. The sign out front says ‘Wrestling,’ and that is what people want to see.”

—Dory Funk Jr., recalling the words of his mentor, the late Gene Kiniski, in an interview with Mike Mooneyham of the Charleston, South Carolina, *The Post And Courier*



WRESTLING ANNUAL

DIXIE CARTER

No Surrender? Not This Month

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



MAY WAS A month during which the realities of life kept intruding on the world of wrestling ... realities like the very real injuries that sidelined three of WWE's top stars.

There was also the reality of professional wrestlers still dealing with drug and alcohol problems.

Then there was the reality of finances and business, which caused TNA to give up on the idea of having a Monday night show. No matter how much Hulk Hogan, Eric Bischoff, and Dixie Carter wanted to start another Monday night war with WWE, it just couldn't happen because the reality of ratings set in and told them now was not the time.

There was a time in the past when people wondered how much of wrestling was real. During the month of May, the question was how much reality could the business take. In fact, it seemed the only place wrestling storylines were allowed to unfold unabatedly was in New Japan Pro Wrestling, which crowned three new champions on a May 3 pay-per-view.

JOHN CENA MAKES BATISTA SAY "I QUIT!"

The early part of the year seemed to belong to Batista and John Cena as they took turns beating the tar out of each other, but the end of their recent rivalry came at Over the Limit, when Batista failed to take the title from Cena in a highly anticipated "I Quit" match.

The bout started at a high

pitch, with Cena clocking "The Animal" with the microphone and dragging him outside the ring, where he took control. The bout seemed to reach a climax when Cena slapped on his favorite submission hold, the STF, but rather than submitting, Batista simply passed out. Unable to get the unconscious Batista to say the magic words, "I quit," Cena resorted to pouring water on Batista's head to revive him. This was a mistake, for the revived Batista started blasting back, nailing Cena with a spinebuster and then smashing him through the Spanish announcer's table.

The two enemies staged the next act of their battle all over the arena, with Batista getting the better of Cena, especially when he worked him over with a metal chair, pounding the champ over and over again across the ribs and back. Cena was resilient, though, refus-

Cena heard those two magic words



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**ONCE PUNK
SAW WHAT HE
LOOKED LIKE,
HE GREW
FURIOUS,
LASHING AT
MYSTERIO
WITH KICKS.**

His new Punk look



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ing to quit. At one point, Batista climbed into a car and tried to run over Cena, only to miss and hit a bank of lights.

Frustrated by his inability to turn Cena into roadkill, Batista climbed out of the car and walked right into the champion's fists. Cena, suddenly rejuvenated, slammed Batista headfirst into the car's hood more than a dozen times. He then hoisted Batista into the air for an Attitude Adjustment and planted Batista across the car's hood with a thud that reverberated throughout the arena. When that failed to make Batista

quit, Cena hoisted him up for another Attitude Adjustment, only this time with the intention of throwing him from the top of the car through the entrance ramp. Balancing on Cena's shoulders and seeing the long drop ahead of him, Batista waved his arms frantically and shouted, "I quit!"

Cena threw Batista off anyway, sending him through the ramp.

REY MYSTERIO JR. SHAVES CM PUNK, WITH AN ASSIST FROM KANE

After Rey Mysterio Jr. finished his bout with CM Punk at Over the Edge with a crucifix pin out of nowhere, leaving a shocked Punk on the canvas in defeat, it looked like we were about to see what we'd been hoping to see—Punk getting his head shaved. After all the abuse Punk and his Straight Edge Society cronies had put Mysterio through so far in 2010, it was time for a little payback. But out of the blue, a masked S.E.S. member appeared and flattened Mysterio. Then, in the best cult leader tradition, Punk called out for reinforcements—Luke Gallows and Serena.

Gallows and Punk began handcuffing Mysterio to the ropes, only to be interrupted

by the booming thunder of Kane's theme music. After a blast of pyrotechnics, Kane stalked down to the ring, took out Gallows and the masked attacker, and then crushed Punk with a high-powered chokeslam.

With Punk suitably dazed, Mysterio went about the business at hand. After cuffing the Straight Edge spokesman to the ropes and jarring his teeth with a 6-1-9, he began shaving swatches of hair from Punk's scalp. After triumphantly holding up some hunks of hair, Mysterio then left the ring. The loyal Serena covered Punk's head with a blanket, but Mysterio returned with a mirror so Punk could see himself. Once Punk saw what he looked like, he grew furious, lashing at Mysterio with kicks. But there was nothing he could do, for he was still cuffed to the ropes and his long black hair was a thing of the past.

BRET HART WINS U.S. TITLE, BECOMES RAW GENERAL MANAGER

During the lengthy feud between The Hart Dynasty and Show-Miz, Bret Hart frequently worked the Dynasty's corners. This eventually led to The Miz losing a stipulation match to Tyson Kidd on May 10, which earned any member of The Hart Dynasty a match for the U.S. championship.

But instead of choosing a member of the Dynasty, The Miz coyly chose 53-year-old Bret. Figuring Bret to be out of shape after many years away from the ring, Miz thought he was in for an easy title defense. But despite Chris Jericho, William Regal, and Vladimir Kozlov attempting to interfere on The Miz' behalf, Hart benefited from the help of the Dynasty and defeated The Miz with the Sharpshooter to win his record-tying fifth U.S. championship on May 17.

Hart's win drew some harsh criticism from a certain segment of fans who were strongly against putting him in the ring when he's had a history of health problems and obviously can't perform the way he did when he was one of the top stars of the 1990s. But before any sort of backlash could be mounted, Hart was named the new general manager of Raw. On the May 24 edition of



WRESTLING

STING vs. JEFF JARRETT

TNA Sacrifice, May 16, 2010

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



His Hart's in the right place

AMONG HART'S FIRST MOVES AS GM WAS INSTIGATING THE DEPARTURE OF BATISTA AND ANNOUNCING THAT THE MAY 31 RAW WOULD BE 'VIEWERS' CHOICE NIGHT.' THE ONLY WRONG NOTE WAS WHEN VINCE McMAHON JOINED HIM AND PERFORMED A BIZARRE CELEBRATORY DANCE AROUND THE RING.

Raw, "The Hitman" promptly vacated the U.S. title and once again retired from the ring to fulfill his new duties.

Among Hart's first moves as GM was instigating the departure of Batista and announcing that the May 31 Raw would be "viewers' choice night." He was off to a fine start. The only wrong note was when Vince McMahon joined him and performed a bizarre celebratory dance around the ring.

BATISTA QUILTS WWE

The night after losing to Cena at Over the Edge, Batista appeared on the May 24 edition of Raw in a wheelchair. In a dimly lit ring, he addressed the crowd, grousing about the loss to Cena. Batista's pity party was interrupted by new GM Bret Hart, who informed him that he would have to wrestle Randy Orton to qualify for a match at the new pay-per-view, Fatal 4-Way, where he would be one of three challengers to wrestle for Cena's WWE championship.

Outraged at being forced to wrestle even though he was injured, and with some goading from Hart and the fans, Batista lost his composure and declared that he was quitting the company.

Although there'd been some question as to whether Batista's contract with WWE would be renewed, it was rare to see a performer quitting the company as part of the show. Some fans wondered if what they were seeing was genuine or not. Batista's

profile was subsequently moved to the www.com/alumni page.

There'd been many rumors swirling around Batista's exit, everything from unhappiness at not getting a role in a WWE-produced movie, to having problems backstage, to having injured himself at Over the Limit, to his interest in pursuing a career in mixed martial arts. Batista, 41, later said in

an interview that he left WWE because he did not like the company's PG direction and wouldn't be returning anytime soon.

CARLITO RELEASED AFTER REFUSING REHAB

Carlito was released from his WWE



Carlito blew it with WWE

Photo by Wayne McCarty



EDDIE EDWARDS VS CHRIS DANIELS
ROH Supercard of Honor V May 8, 2010

Photo by Scott Finkstein

ROH
RING

ROH
RING



Photo by George Napolitano

Greatness is in their blood

THE USOS ARE THE TWIN SONS OF FORMER WWE STAR RIKISHI, WHILE THE LOVELY BUT MALEVOLENT TAMINA IS NONE OTHER THAN SARONA REIHER, THE DAUGHTER OF WWE HALL OF FAMER JIMMY 'SUPERFLY' SNUKA.

contract as of May 21, 2010. According to WWE, "Carlito's termination was due to his first violation of the WWE Wellness Program and his subsequent refusal to attend a rehabilitation facility."

Carlito's release may not have seemed like news to those who had expected it to happen. Rumors had circulated for months that Carlito was a lazy, disruptive force backstage, and that his behavior kept him from reaching greater heights within the company. Carlito had been sent to a rehabilitation clinic in 2009 to be evaluated for a possible drug addiction, but after being cleared, he was kept off TV for a time because of attitude problems.

He explained on Twitter, "Then they kept me at home because they felt I was very angry at work. I was!" The final straw was when Carlito allegedly showed up for a TV taping in no condition to perform.

Carlito's father, Carlos Colon, attempted to do damage control on behalf of his family and son, telling the Puerto Rican press that Carlito was addicted to painkillers and not recreational or performance-enhancing drugs.

Meanwhile, Carlito told *The (U.K.) Sun* that he had been struggling with painkillers for three years, using them

as anti-depressants. He also claimed to have gone through a change in attitude, admitting that he had been unhappy in WWE for quite some time. Carlito was particularly disgruntled that WWE turned him from an applesplitting bad guy to a babyface. He didn't go so far as to say he had gotten himself fired on purpose, but he'd definitely lost his enthusiasm for the big company. "I wanted to get away," Carlito told *The Sun*.

THE USOS AND TAMINA IMPRESS IN WWE DEBUTS

Just when things were looking good for The Hart Dynasty, they turned for the worse at the May 24 *Raw*. David Hart Smith and Tyson Kidd had just defeated William Regal and Vladimir Koslov in a routine tag match, when three strangers, two male and one female, attacked them. It was as if a cyclone hit the ring, and within seconds all three members of the Hart team were laid out.

The culprits were the Uso Brothers, Jimmy and Jey, and Tamina, a terrifying Samoan trio with some strong roots in the wrestling business. The Usos are the twin sons of former WWE star Rikishi—the 400-pound dancing master—while the lovely but malevolent Tamina is none other than Sarona Reiher, the daughter of WWE Hall of Famer Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka. The new team's pedigree definitely showed—all three were adept at Snuka-type splashes from the corner turnbuckle, and they also seemed comfortable delivering the type of carnage Snuka used to create in his heel days. Since Jimmy and Jey are part of the Anoa'i family, which includes such stars as Afa, Sika, and Umaga, it's safe to say that mayhem is in the team's genetic code.

A week later, the Usos and Tamina turned up again, taking center stage and introducing themselves to the May 31 *Raw* crowd. The Dynasty stormed the ring to get some revenge for the previous week's beatdown, but the Samoan trio destroyed them again. The month might have been ending, but this feud was just beginning.

UNDERTAKER, BETH PHOENIX, RANDY ORTON INJURED

Three of WWE's biggest stars were all downed by injuries in the same month.

First up, Randy Orton suffered a nasty shoulder separation during his bout with Edge at the Over the Limit pay-per-view in Detroit. Born with hypermobile shoulders, meaning the joints stretch farther than normal, Orton spent much of the match with his arm dangling uselessly at his side. Still, he showed a lot of determination and commitment by finishing the bout. This was a bad break for Orton and WWE, as Orton was on a roll since WrestleMania 26, and was gradually gaining the acceptance of WWE fans after years of being a heel.

Midway through the month, Beth Phoenix was seriously injured during a

Superstars taping, hurting her knee during a bout with Rosa Mendes. The bout was going to be stopped, but Phoenix bravely finished and was seen on crutches after the show. She was scheduled for surgery that week to repair a sprained MCL and a torn ACL.

Finally, The Undertaker suffered a broken nose, a broken orbital bone, and a concussion, courtesy of a Rey Mysterio Jr. 6-1-9 during the May 25 *Smackdown* taping. The injuries were enough to keep 'Taker out of the upcoming Fatal 4-Way pay-per-view.

It's hard to say which injury affected the company most. Orton was on the verge of becoming a new fan favorite, Undertaker was knocked out of a pay-per-view main event, and Phoenix's injury, which would keep her out of action the longest, came when *Smackdown*'s Diva crew was already depleted.

ORTON SPENT MUCH OF THE MATCH WITH HIS ARM DANGLING USELESSLY AT HIS SIDE. STILL, HE SHOWED A LOT OF DETERMINATION AND COMMITMENT BY FINISHING THE BOUT.



Photo by George Napolitano

Mendes and Phoenix weren't so chummy after the injury

HULK HOGAN CONFRONTS STING ON IMPACT

After weeks of bad behavior, including attacks on Hulk Hogan and Rob Van Dam, Sting finally let TNA fans know what was on his mind. Granted, he did it in the sort of roundabout way that left TNA fans frustrated, but it was a start.

It occurred on the May 3 edition of *Impact* and was called "The Summit." Hogan, fed up with Sting's mysterious attacks, called him out. Sting sauntered to the ring and waited for Hogan to talk. Hogan, of course, wasn't at a loss for words. Bellowing in his well-worn fashion, Hogan said that he'd been in the business too long and couldn't be fooled. He wanted to know what made Sting tick. Sting cackled and said that it was TNA that made him tick, and his love for the wrestling business. Sting also pointed out that Hogan has always had protection in the past, but had no such thing in TNA.

Hogan growled back, saying that Sting was trying to



Photo by Lee Soul/TNA Wrestling

Out-of-control Sting needed a good talking to

STING HELD HIS BAT UNDER HOGAN'S CHIN IN A MENACING POSE, SAYING THAT HOGAN WAS ALWAYS A GREAT CHESS PLAYER, AND IT WAS TIME FOR HIM TO MAKE A MOVE. HOGAN CHALLENGED STING TO TAKE HIS BEST SHOT.

choke the life out of TNA, attacking one performer at a time, but that the games were going to stop. Sting held his bat under Hogan's chin in a menacing pose, saying that Hogan was always a great chess player, and it was time for him to make a move. Hogan challenged Sting to take his best shot.

Sting tossed aside the bat and microphone, as if he were ready to fight. But just when it looked like the two veterans might get into a little brawl, TNA co-founder Jeff Jarrett attacked Sting from behind.

THREE TITLES CHANGE HANDS AT IWGP PPV

There was no shortage of drama in New Japan Pro Wrestling during the month of May, as three titles changed hands on a May 3 IWGP pay-per-view from the International Center

Arena in Fukuoka, Japan.

In a textbook example of overachieving, IWGP veteran and former tag team champion Shinya "Togi" Makabe defeated heavyweight champion Shinsuke Nakamura to win his first IWGP heavyweight title.

It was the fifth title shot for the popular Makabe, who, perhaps best known for emulating the late Bruiser Brody—from his in-ring tactics to his theme music—put Nakamura away with two top-rope kneedrops at 18:18.

Few could have predicted Makabe's ascension, as he was regarded as little more than a mid-carder throughout most of his career, despite having received multiple title shots in the past. Meanwhile, the former champ was left without the belt and suffering a shoulder injury in the upset loss.

Also at the pay-per-view, Jushin Liger defeated Mexican star Negro Casas with a Thesz press at 10:41 to claim the CMLL middleweight championship.

The team of Yuji Nagata and Wataru Inoue won the tag team title in a three-way bout over the teams of Giant Bernard and Ken Anderson and IWGP tag team champions Tetsuya Naito and Yujiro Takahashi, when Inoue pinned Anderson.

The only champion to retain his title on the night was Pro Wrestling NOAH's Naomichi Marufuji, who downed challenger Ryusuke Taguchi with a Tiger flowsion in 22:26 to keep his IWGP junior heavyweight championship.

TNA FIRES BUBBA THE LOVE SPONGE

Nearly five months after his altercation with Awesome Kong backstage at a January *Impact* taping, shock jock Bubba the Love Sponge sparked an on-air confrontation with Kong that would cost him his job as a commentator with TNA.

A co-worker at BTLS's station invited Kong to speak on the air. During the phone conversation between "Cowhead" (the DJ) and Kong, Bubba, who had been in the studio all along, suddenly let loose with a racially and sexually offensive tirade on Kong that persisted even after she hung up the phone.



Bubba banished

Two days later, TNA announced that Bubba was finished with the company, mainly because TNA had to answer to advertisers for his racially charged remarks. TNA clearly wanted to show that it has a zero-tolerance policy for such comments from its employees, but the firing only seemed to inspire more bad behavior from Bubba, who then turned his venom on Dixie Carter and TNA.

On his May 3 broadcast, Bubba basically mocked Carter for being a "mark" and said she relies on the Internet to manage the company. He also claimed that nobody wanted to advertise with TNA anyway because it's such "a horrible product." Bubba also said that TNA is "so far under the radar" that nobody would even notice his remarks. In the end, BTLS tried to blame his firing on a critical column penned by wrestling columnist Kevin Eck of the *Baltimore Sun*.

IN OTHER NEWS ...

The Hart Dynasty successfully defended the WWE Unified tag team belts against The Big Show and The Miz at Over the Limit ... Hulk Hogan underwent back surgery ... "Macho Man" Randy Savage got married ... Former WWE Diva Maria Kanellis was fired from Donald Trump's *Celebrity Apprentice* ...

Photo by Al Goldstein/NBC



Finlay was dropped from WWE's active roster... Doug Williams became TNA's new X division champion by defeating Kazarian at Sacrifice ... Ryota Hama dropped All-Japan Pro Wrestling's Triple Crown championship to Minoru Suzuki ... R-Truth defeated Miz for the U.S. title after it was vacated by

Bret Hart ... Kofi Kingston officially won the Intercontinental title from Drew McIntyre at Over the Limit ... Yoshihiro Takayama won Pro Wrestling NOAH's heavyweight singles tournament ... CM Punk was slapped by an enraged fan at the May 1 Smackdown house show in Knoxville, Tennessee. Apparently, the fan, an older woman, was outraged by what she perceived to be Punk's impersonation of Jesus. After yelling at Punk from her ringside seat, the woman slapped him in the face. She was promptly escorted from the building by security.

... TNA ANNOUNCED THAT BUBBA WAS FINISHED WITH THE COMPANY ... TNA CLEARLY WANTED TO SHOW THAT IT HAS A ZERO-TOLERANCE POLICY FOR SUCH COMMENTS FROM ITS EMPLOYEES.

Kanellis, Lauper, Osbourne: all connected to WWE, all fired by Trump

BUSINESS STORY OF THE MONTH: *IMPACT* MOVES BACK TO THURSDAYS

After so much hoopla about *TNA Impact* moving to Monday nights, TNA's flagship program quietly returned to Thursdays. Of course, the group put a positive spin on the move, claiming the fans had spoken and told them the show really belongs on Thursday nights. For those who can read between the lines, the move was seen as the inevitable result of a failed experiment. Bringing Hulk Hogan into the fold was simply not enough to make *Impact* competitive against *Monday Night Raw*, the 500-pound gorilla of Monday night cable. As Jim Ross might've said, TNA went running back to Thursdays like a scolded dog.

Although there'd been some excitement when *Impact* first aired on Mondays—its Monday night debut drew more

than three million viewers—ratings for *Impact* eventually shrunk to as low as .5, less than half of what it averaged before moving from Thursday night. On May 13, during its first show back in its original Thursday night slot, *Impact* scored a rating of 0.93, approximately 0.15 higher than the show's final Monday night rating from May 3.

As far as Monday Night Wars go, this recent one will not inspire commemorative DVDs or books, and people will not reminisce about it in 2020. It was just a few months of TNA learning that Hogan and Ric Flair, no matter how much blood they shed, aren't going to steal viewers from *Raw*. But just the fact that TNA tried to stir things up shows that the company has a lot of fighting spirit.

WRESTLER OF THE MONTH: JOHN CENA

He can rile up WWE audiences with his work on the microphone, he can be funny, he can be melodramatic, he can sell truckloads of toys and T-shirts, and his matches rival those of any WWE superstar for excitement. At heart, though, despite the trappings of stardom, John Cena remains a blue-collar workhorse. In May, we saw several examples of his inspiring work ethic.

Cena started the month in a big way by defeating Wade Barrett by submission in a "Beat The Clock" challenge at the Jacksonville, Florida, *Raw*. Cena then journeyed to Toronto, where he engaged in a violent match with Sheamus that was ruined when Batista interfered, giving Cena the win by disqualification. While in Canada, Cena teamed with Randy Orton on a series of house shows, whipping the team of Sheamus and Ted DiBiase Jr. Cena and Orton also teamed up for house shows in Cincinnati, Ohio, and

Monterrey, Mexico, defeating the combination of Sheamus and Batista. Then Cena was off to *Raw* in Toledo, Ohio, where he participated in a triple-threat match with Edge and Chris Jericho. Cena's month climaxed, of course, with his "I Quit" match victory against Batista at *Over the Limit*.

After dispatching Batista, Cena returned to house shows and beat Jericho twice, first in New Orleans on May 28, and then again on May 29 in Memphis, Tennessee, where Cena received a bigger crowd pop than hometown favorite Jerry Lawler. Cena capped off his month on the May 31 *Raw* by teaming with Evan Bourne to beat Jericho and Edge in Austin, Texas.

Maybe it wasn't the most spectacular month of Cena's career, but it showcased the kind of workmanlike effort that has helped make him the backbone of WWE in this era.

MATCH OF THE MONTH: ROB VAN DAM vs. AJ STYLES

Among the many dream matches proposed by fans on Internet forums during the past few years was a fantasy bout between AJ Styles and the supposedly retired Rob Van Dam.

These wistful fans finally saw their dream realized in 2010. In April, RVD won the TNA World championship from Styles, and in May, he defended it against Styles at *Sacrifice*.

Though they'd also squared off at house shows throughout the South, there was a bittersweet feeling as the series played out. The dream bouts were taking place as

TNA struggled on Monday nights, and not even the arrival of RVD could help boost ratings. Still, RVD and Styles lived up to their end of the deal, and their matches have been everything their fans could've asked for.

Their bout at *Sacrifice* was one of the things TNA did right in May. There were enough near-falls in this match to keep the most jaded fans interested. With Ric Flair hyperventilating at ringside—he was banned from being in Styles' corner, but stayed at the announcer's table—Styles was working hard to regain the title, adding a little more brawling and roughhousing to his usual gymnastic

style, and RVD, only a few weeks into his TNA championship reign, was showing that he's not far removed from being the high-flyer he was 10 years ago.

After several minutes of gripping action, with neither man gaining a clear advantage, Styles moved into high gear, putting RVD in the torture rack and then spinning him into a power bomb. RVD was able to kick out at two, but Styles nearly decapitated him with a clothesline and went for another pin. RVD again kicked out at two.

As the action grew more intense, Flair ran to ringside, only to be intercepted by Jay Lethal. While Flair and Lethal traded chops on the entrance ramp, Styles began maneuvering RVD into position for a superplex. Showing the survival instinct that was probably instilled in him during his ECW days, RVD slithered out and drove Styles throat-first into the top rope. Then, as Lethal slapped a figure-four on Flair, RVD climbed to the top turnbuckle and delivered a perfect Five Star Frog Splash to earn the win and retain the championship.

ODDBALL STORY OF THE MONTH: MICK FOLEY CALLS TRIPLE-H "MEAN" FOR PICKING ON LILIAN GARCIA

Mick Foley didn't see the April 18 *Raw* until May, but when he did, he found Triple-H's comments about Lilian Garcia to be way out of line.

During the opening segment of the show, Triple-H commanded a microphone and said, "If Lilian wants to come back here for one night to the WWE just to horse around, she can do it." The horse reference, which was followed by a whinnying sound from Jerry Lawler, purportedly had something to do with a crass backstage joke that Garcia resembles a horse.

Garcia, retired from WWE since September 2009, was helping out at *Raw* because regular ring announcer Justin Roberts and other WWE members were stranded in Europe as a result of the volcanic eruption that delayed several flights. She took Triple-H's comment in stride; Foley, though, had something to say about them.

On his MySpace page, Foley let Triple-H have it. Along with calling Triple-H "shallow" and "mean," he wrote, "I don't get what possible satisfaction anyone involved gets from demeaning someone like Lilian Garcia. I just don't get it." It wasn't exactly as strong a reaction as when Foley chased Triple-H with a barbed-wire bat, but it got the Internet humming.

Some wondered if Foley was overre-



Photo by Lee Sroufe/TNA Wrestling

acting. After all, very few people join WWE without being insulted a time or two, and Foley has insulted his share of people, from Al Snow to Test. But just when it seemed Foley was making something out of nothing, Garcia wrote to Foley on her Twitter account, "Your care for my feelings proves what a loving, caring, and wonderful human being you are. This is why I truly miss working with you. You are one of a kind! Thank you, love you!"



Photo by Lee Sroufe/TNA Wrestling

QUOTES OF THE MONTH



Photo by George Napolitano

"I've got young kids. Years ago, we were what we were, and I certainly wouldn't want to have my young kids watch that product. We've evolved."

—Triple-H, telling *The New York Times* that he approves of WWE's new PG era

"Once and for all, let's stop the [B.S.] and put things in no uncertain terms. Without guys like

me, Ted DiBiase, you never would have worked a main-event match in the WWF."

—The Ultimate Warrior, addressing DiBiase's claim that Warrior doesn't belong in the WWE Hall of Fame, from Warrior's website

"I told [WWE] to have Triple-H pick me up in a limo, then we could go test together. They never asked again."

—Scott Steiner, discussing WWE's Wellness Policy on *Slam! Sports*



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

WINNERS AND LOSERS

WINNERS

BRET HART: The man who was bitter about WWE's treatment of him for more than decade won the U.S. title and the GM's job

REY MYSTERIO JR.: Finally got the best of CM Punk

JOHN CENA: Proved his superiority over Batista

RAW: Easily retained its top spot on Mondays

TOGI MAKABE: Pedestrian wrestler outdoes himself

LOSERS

ANYONE WHO WANTED A RETURN OF THE MONDAY NIGHT WAR: Our heart goes out to you

THE HART DYNASTY: Destroyed twice by Usos and Tamina

AJ STYLES: Wishes RVD never showed up in TNA

CARLITO: Had a good gig and he blew it

TRIPLE-H: Lilian—a horseface? We think not!



Photo by George Napolitano

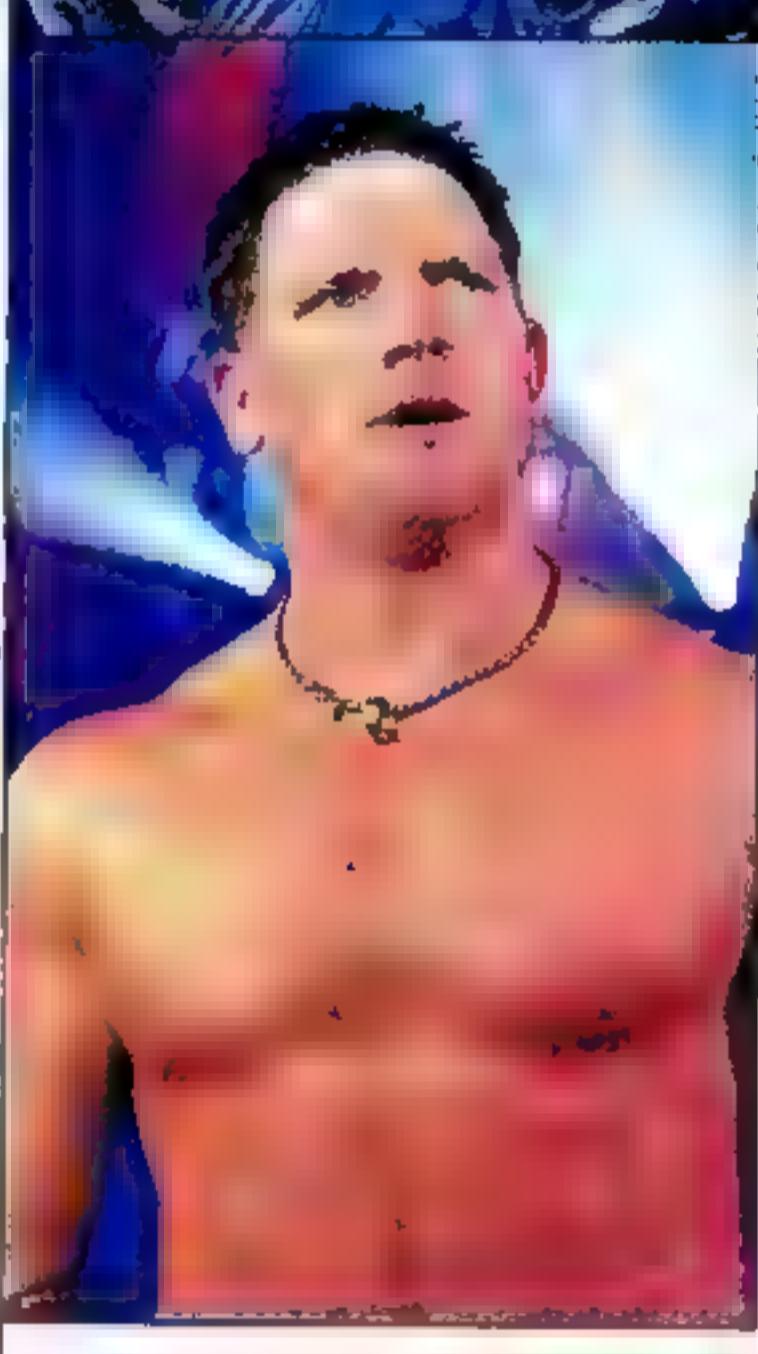


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

"I don't want to be in the ring, then again, I never intended to be this year. We're hopeful [a comeback] never happens."

—Vince McMahon handicapping the chances he'll assume an in-ring wrestling role anytime soon

"I would just like to apologize for the past three years because I disrespected a lot of people. I was just bitter and miserable. I was in a dark place."

—Carlito, on his dismissal from WWE, *The (U.K.) Sun*

"I'm not like everybody else. I'm going to stand my ground, and a deal will be done if it's to my liking and to my liking only."

—Bill Goldberg, discussing the possibility of a WWE in-ring comeback at the Jewish Hall of Fame induction ceremony

WRESTLING

ABYSS

Line Forth



WRESTLING JUNE

COMPILED BY **Al Alven**

THE "LIVING LEGEND" Larry Zbyszko often likened professional wrestling to a game of chess. One of the sport's more cerebral pontificators, Zbyszko understood that every action—and inaction—had a consequence.

Wade Barrett emerged as the winner of *NXT* Season One, but made his big move by rounding up his former rivals and targeting WWE's top dog: John Cena. Ensuing attacks and the formation of The Nexus heralded a powerful new force on Monday nights. Meanwhile, a new crop of rookies prepared to make their mark as *NXT* Season Two began.

Sheamus and Rey Mysterio Jr. were not viewed as favorites entering their respective championship matches at Fatal 4-Way. However, both would execute their game plans, were opportunistic, and benefited from a little bit of luck, leading to unexpected title victories.

TNA champion Rob Van Dam and ROH kingpin Tyler Black outplayed and outwitted their challengers to stay on top. Tommy Dreamer resurfaced with unknown intentions, while an instinctive return to the dark side allowed Abyss to find himself again.

Not so fortunate was indy legend/*NXT* flop Daniel Bryan, whose overzealousness cost

him a glorious opportunity ... or did it? And then there was Hall of Famer Rick Steamboat, whose decision to put himself in harm's way may have contributed to near-tragedy.

Away from the ring, Martha Hart's lawsuit against the McMahons sent shockwaves through the halls of WWE Headquarters in Connecticut. Just as news of the deaths of Grizzly Smith, Trent Acid, and Toni Adams reverberated in different and diverse ways throughout the industry.

WADE BARRETT WINS *NXT*, FORMS THE NEXUS

In a span of one week, Wade Barrett went from being anointed WWE's "next breakout star" to the leader of the most feared faction to debut on *Raw* perhaps since Evolution—Triple-H, Ric Flair, Randy Orton, and Batista—more than five years ago.

The devious Manchester, England, native entered the final episode of *NXT*

Barrett leads The Nexus uprising



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IN A SOMEWHAT STRANGE TURN OF EVENTS, THE FIRST EPISODE WOULD END WITH THE EIGHT PROS COLLECTIVELY JUMPING THE ROOKIE IMPORTS FROM FLORIDA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING IN AN ATTEMPT TO SQUASH ANY THOUGHTS OF ANOTHER MASS REBELLION.

Looking for
WWE's next MVP

Season One as the favorite to win the competition, tops in the "Pros' Poll," ahead of David Otunga and Justin Gabriel. The three rookies squared off in a triple-threat match, with Barrett scoring the win before officially being announced as the inaugural season winner.

After being awarded a WWE contract and a future pay-per-view title opportunity, most figured that Barrett would be content, perhaps even bide his time while deciding whether to compete on Raw or Smackdown. They couldn't have been more wrong.

Less than a week later, Barrett would appear on *Raw* during an intra-brand main event match between John Cena and CM Punk. He was joined by the other members of the *NXT* Season One field—Otunga, Gabriel, Heath Slater, Michael Tarver, Skip Sheffield, Darren Young, and Daniel Bryan.

Together, the eight upstarts cornered and brutally assaulted Cena, also taking out Punk, referees, ringside attendants, color commentator Jerry "The King" Lawler, and ring announcer Justin Roberts, dismantling the ring in the process.

This unexpected attack was viewed as one of the most impactful statements in WWE history.

Over the next two weeks, the newly christened Nexus (sans Bryan) took out Raw General Manager Bret Hart and WWE Chairman Vince McMahon. All seven were awarded contracts by a new "anonymous" Raw GM, plunging the lockerroom into chaos.

The Nexus attacks would continue, with Barrett and his army tilting the balance of power in Nexus' favor.

NXT SEASON TWO KICKS OFF

With the Nexus attack on John Cena (and, by proxy, the entire WWE) fresh in everyone's mind, *NXT* Season Two began with a sense of both excitement and trepidation.

In a somewhat strange turn of events, the first episode would end with the eight pros collectively jumping the rookie imports from Florida Championship Wrestling in an attempt to squash any thoughts of another mass rebellion.

This would set the tone for a contentious season. While the new crop of



WRESTLING ANNUAL

RANDY ORTON vs. EDGE
WWE Raw, June 19, 2010

Photo by George Napolitano



THE NEXUS INITIALLY WENT AFTER CENA, BUT TURNED ITS ATTENTION TO EDGE AFTER HE TRIED TO INTERVENE. AMID THE COMMOTION, SHEAMUS MANAGED TO SCORE THE PINFALL ON CENA TO EARN HIS SECOND WWE TITLE REIGN.

Sheamus proves a point vs. Cena



Photo by George Napolitano

youngsters may or may not have been on par with their previous season counterparts in terms of talent, it certainly wasn't lacking in ego.

The Miz would be the only returning pro, this time mentoring a virtual clone in the obnoxious Alex Riley; the duo instantly got along much better than the Miz-Daniel Bryan mismatch, which created many memorable moments during NXT Season One.

The best-known competitor was Kaval, a 12-year vet best known in the independents as Low-Ki. The former Ring of Honor champion was oddly partnered with Michelle McCool and Layla, a move that many considered a slap in the face to the "smart mark" community.

Other pro-rookie pairs included: MVP and "Showtime" Percy Watson, Kofi Kingston and Michael McGillicutty, "Dashing" Cody Rhodes and Husky Harris, Mark Henry and Lucky Cannon, Zack Ryder and Titus O'Neil, and John Morrison and Eli Cottonwood.

The field included two third-generation competitors in McGillicutty and Harris. McGillicutty (formerly Joe Henning) is the son of "Mr. Perfect" Curt Henning and grandson of Larry "The Ax" Henning, while Harris (formerly Duke Rotundo) is the son of Mike Rotundo and grandson of Blackjack Mulligan.

Kaval entered as the favorite, though there was some concern over how he

would perform and be perceived, given how fellow indy favorite Bryan was unsuccessful and quickly eliminated the previous season.

SHEAMUS, MYSTERIO WIN BIG AT FATAL 4-WAY

In the latest example of WWE's trend toward themed pay-per-views, the company presented the inaugural Fatal 4-Way event on June 20 in Uniondale, New York.

The concept would only be applied to the two main-event matches, with both the WWE heavyweight and World championship titles being contested under four-way, one-fall rules.

Raw's entry would see John Cena defending the WWE title against rivals Edge, Randy Orton, and Sheamus—all former champions. Going into the match, the threat of The Nexus lingered, as it had only been a few weeks since the rookies' initial attack on Cena, and Wade Barrett and company had continued to wreak havoc since.

Sure enough, the group interjected itself into the fray, causing a premature ending. The Nexus initially went after Cena, but turned its attention to Edge after he tried to intervene. Amid the commotion, Sheamus managed to score the pinfall on Cena to earn his second WWE title reign.

The World title match was equally controversial.

Champion Jack Swagger was given little chance to hold on to his belt, and understandably so, with former champs Rey Mysterio Jr., Big Show, and CM Punk challenging. Punk appeared to be on his way to victory after hitting Swagger with his Go To Sleep finisher, but he was soon taken out by Kane, who was in a state of rage after recently finding his brother, The Undertaker, in a "vegetative" state.

Mysterio, no stranger to Kane's wrath, nonetheless escaped the harm that befell Punk, gaining the pin on Swagger to win his second World title.

Two title matches—two new champions—with very similar finishes.





The McMahons haven't heard the last of her

OWEN'S BROTHER BRET HAS BEEN ESTRANGED FROM AND HIGHLY CRITICAL OF MARTHA'S MOTIVATIONS IN THE PAST. HE MADE IT CLEAR THROUGH A STATEMENT THAT HE VEHEMENTLY OPPOSED THE LAWSUIT, AND STOOD FIRMLY IN WWE'S CORNER.

She also cited "deceptive business practices" in not paying royalty payments due to Owen's estate, including to his two children, Oje and Athena.

More specifically, the suit claimed WWE violated its original 2000 settlement agreement in the wake of Owen's death, with the release of the *Hart & Soul* documentary.

The timing of the suit was immediately questioned, considering that Linda McMahon—former company CEO—was in the midst of her highly publicized U.S. Senate campaign in Connecticut.

Owen's brother Bret, who had returned to WWE after a long absence earlier in the year, has been estranged from and highly critical of Martha's motivations in the past. He made it clear through a statement that he vehemently opposed the lawsuit, and stood firmly in WWE's corner.

Striking out against the suit by calling Martha's charges "stupid" and "selfish," in turn, caused some to lash out at Bret, especially considering his many criticisms of WWE and the situation surrounding the death of his brother in the past. Overall, though, it seemed as if the majority of the wrestling world, at least, took WWE's side right along with Bret.

MARTHA HART SUES McMAHONS

Three weeks after the tragic death of Owen Hart in 1999, Hart's widow, Martha, launched a wrongful death lawsuit against the then-WWF, which was settled out of court for approximately \$18-million.

A little more than a decade later, Martha filed another suit against Vince and Linda McMahon, this time for wrongfully using Owen's name and likeness in numerous DVD releases.

WWE shot back at Martha by defending itself with the release of legal documents totaling over 100 pages. Within, the company defended itself against Martha's "bizarre and legally defective" allegations, arguing that the lawsuit could not be sustained against the McMahons in their capacity as corporate officers.

ROH CHAMP TYLER BLACK TURNS BACK DAVEY RICHARDS

Despite the belt around his waist and his domination over everyone put in his way, the jury was still out on Tyler Black. Since capturing the ROH championship from Austin Aries earlier in the year, Black still craved the acceptance of the fans. He lacked, after all, that reign-defining victory those who preceded him had earned to cement their status.

Hardcore ROH fans often recall Samoa Joe's huge wins over the likes of Bryan Danielson, Christopher Daniels, Homicide, and others during his near-legendary reign. Aries had successful defenses against Joe, Colt Cabana, and James Gibson. Danielson turned back Steve Corino, Chris Hero, Kenta, etc.

At Death Before Dishonor VIII, Black would have his opportunity to stake his claim as a legitimate champion in the fans' eyes in a defense against Davey Richards, who seemed cut from the very cloth with which the company was sewn together.

For many fans and observers, it was practically Richards' birthright to win this match and become ROH champion. But Black had other ideas.

The match, as expected, was intense and physical. It would go over 30 minutes, with both men kicking out of each others' finishers, escaping several near-falls down the stretch. It would take Black three attempts to finally put Richards away with a series of thrust kicks and a third small package driver.

Afterward, the fans chanted "Thank you!" and "Match of the Year" at both men. Richards then grabbed the mike and congratulated Black, a seminal moment for the ROH champ and a satisfying moment of acceptance.

Black proclaimed Richards his friend, as the two embraced to cap off what was instantly touted as one of the greatest ROH championship matches in the company's eight-year history.

ABYSS REDISCOVERS HIS DARK SIDE

It only seemed to be a matter of time before Abyss' stint as Hulk Hogan's cute, cuddly side-kick would come to an end

... and a screeching, violent end at that, considering the "Monster's" history.

Regardless, *Impact* announcers Mike Tenay and Taz sounded stunned when Abyss viciously attacked his opponents—Mr. Anderson and Jeff Hardy—after a three-way match to determine a number-one contender to Rob Van Dam's TNA World title.

Previously, Abyss had been reunited with Chelsea, who turned on Desmond Wolfe and helped Abyss win a bloody Monster's Ball match at Slammiversary VIII. After Abyss was forced to turn custody of Chelsea back over to Wolfe, he went over the edge.

Abyss was quickly confronted by a furious Hogan for his attack on Anderson and Hardy, but it wouldn't be until the following week that things truly took a turn for the worse.

First came the incomprehensible ranting. Abyss, out of nowhere, began to claim that he was being controlled by an entity, something that was coming soon to TNA. He referred to this unseen force only as "They."

When Hogan again attempted to reason with his former charge, Abyss shoved Hogan's WWE Hall of Fame ring down his throat.

The mystery surrounding the identity of "They" notwithstanding, the TNA lockerroom once again had a crazed monster to deal with. One that wielded a large wooden board studded with nails that he named "Janice."

Abyss' attacks on Anderson and Hardy continued, as he chokeslammed

both through the *Impact* ramp in successive weeks in his attempt to get Van Dam's attention. It certainly worked.

DANIEL BRYAN RELEASED BY WWE

On one hand, it could be argued that Daniel Bryan had to do what he had to do. On the other, there is such a thing as going too far.

After being unceremoniously ousted as one of the first eliminations from *NXT* Season One, the longtime indy favorite likely felt that he had to do something drastic to be noticed.

A non-title win over U.S. champion and his former *NXT* Pro, The Miz, on *Raw* must have been very satisfying, but it did not help Bryan score a WWE contract.

So, Bryan accepted Wade Barrett's invitation to join The Nexus alongside fellow *NXT* rookies, and took part in the infamous attack on John Cena.

While the incident was shocking and violent, Bryan's actions were deemed over the top by WWE Chairman Vince McMahon. First, he choked out ring announcer Justin Roberts with his own necktie. Then, he spat in Cena's face, repeatedly screaming, "I'm better than you!"

Nothing extraordinary was thought of this until the following weekend, when it was announced that Bryan had been fired for apparently violating the guidelines of WWE's PG rating code.

The news stunned the wrestling world, perhaps more so than The

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



No more Mr. Nice Guy

**FIRST, [BRYAN]
CHOKED OUT
RING
ANNOUNCER
JUSTIN ROBERTS
WITH HIS OWN
NECKTIE. THEN,
HE SPAT IN
CENA'S FACE,
REPEATEDLY
SCREAMING,
"I'M BETTER
THAN YOU!"**

DOCTORS INDICATED THAT THEY DID NOT BELIEVE [STEAMBOAT'S] ANEURYSM WAS IN ANY WAY RELATED TO THE NEXUS ATTACK. BUT SOME FOUND THIS EXPLANATION DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT.

RVD had a little too much offense for the Stinger



Michael Hayes, Mike Rotundo, and Dean Malenko.

All seemed to be going along swimmingly. The fans were into the moment and Steamboat was all smiles, until the now-familiar theme music of The Nexus filled the arena. Out walked six members of the group, sans Wade Barrett, who was said to be conferencing with WWE officials after the recent attacks on John Cena and Vince McMahon.

What came next was predictable—The Nexus assaulted everyone in the ring. They focused their brutality on the 57-year-old Steamboat, who fell victim to Justin Gabriel's devastating 450-splash.

In the aftermath, WWE announced that Steamboat had suffered various injuries during the attack. And then ... art begat life. Two days later, Steamboat experienced legitimate neck and shoulder pain and landed in the hospital. It was soon discovered that he had suffered a brain aneurysm.

Steamboat's condition was listed as stable and he was to be hospitalized indefinitely. Doctors indicated that they did not believe the aneurysm was in any way related to the Nexus attack. But some found this explanation difficult to accept. At the very least, the decision to involve retired wrestlers in angles that put them at serious physical risk was questioned, renewing a debate that will surely continue for some time.

RVD BEATS STING; TOMMY DREAMER DEBUTS AT SLAMMIVERSARY

Tension between Rob Van Dam and Sting had persisted ever since Van Dam scored a quick pinfall victory over the "Icon" in his TNA debut earlier in the year on *Impact*. Just seconds after that loss, Sting took RVD out with his trademark baseball bat.

The two would not meet in another one-on-one match for several months. By the time Slammiversary VIII rolled around, RVD was the TNA World champion. Sting, by virtue of recent performances, was ranked number-one

in the first Top 10 ranking by the TNA Championship Committee, and was thus in line for a title shot.

The match quickly spilled to the outside, with champion and challenger brawling around ringside. Shortly after the action returned to the ring, the referee got caught up in the fray and was knocked unconscious. At this point, Jeff Jarrett, who had been bloodied by Sting the previous month, made his surprise return.

Jarrett attacked Sting, but Sting continued to fight. RVD scored with Rolling Thunder, and Sting was narrowly able to kick out. After Sting missed a Stinger Splash, RVD capitalized with his Five-Star frog splash and got the pin to retain his championship.

TNA President Dixie Carter, meanwhile, had promised yet another "big surprise" at Slammiversary, something that she claimed would change TNA forever. In the days leading up to the PPV, she amended that announcement, stating there would be a surprise at the show, but that a bigger one would be coming later.

The PPV reveal turned out to be the TNA debut of Tommy Dreamer. The "Innovator Of Violence" appeared in the crowd, distracting Brother Ray and causing him an upset loss to Jesse Neal.

GRIZZLY SMITH, TRENT ACID, AND TONI ADAMS PASS AWAY

It is often said that celebrity deaths occur in threes. This was the case for the wrestling world in June.

Grizzly Smith passed away on June 12 from complications brought on by Alzheimer's disease; he was 77. A mountain of a man during his prime, Smith stood a legitimate 6'10" and weighed in at about 350 pounds.

The native Texan is perhaps best known as the father of WWE Hall of Famer Jake "The Snake" Roberts, former NWA Mid-Atlantic heavyweight champion Sam Houston, and former WWF Women's champion Rockin' Robin.

Smith's career highlights included defeating The Spoiler for the NWA

Texas heavyweight title in 1968 and competing as one-half of The Kentuckians alongside Luke "Big Boy" Brown.

Only 29, Trent Acid was found dead in his home on June 18. A lifelong Philadelphian, Acid was a 15-year vet of the Northeast independent scene. He most notably wrestled in Combat Zone Wrestling, where he was a four-time CZW tag team champion with Backseat Boyz partner Johnny Kashmere.

Acid also wrestled in Ring of Honor, East Coast Wrestling Association, and Jersey All Pro Wrestling. Along with Kashmere, he also co-owned Philly-based Pro Wrestling Unplugged.

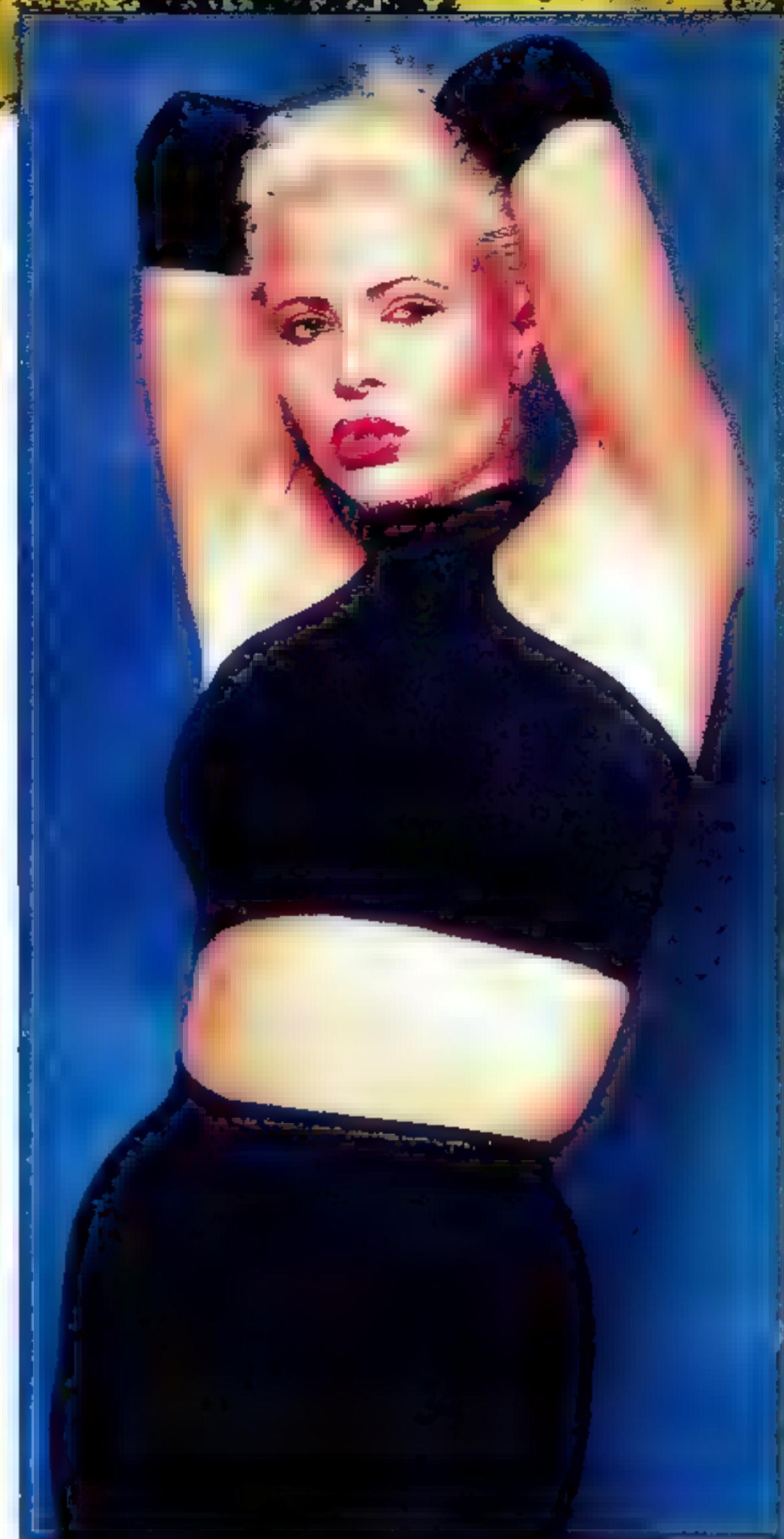
On June 24, Toni Adams died after going into cardiac arrest at age 45. Adams enjoyed memorable runs as the manager of her then-husband "Gentleman" Chris Adams (who passed away in 2001) in World Class Championship Wrestling and the Global Wrestling Federation.

In 1990, the pair was involved in a memorable feud with Steve Austin and Jeannie Clarke (Chris' ex-wife), prior to Austin's arrival on the national stage.

During Adams' career, she also managed Brian Christopher, Scotty Flamingo, Koko B. Ware, Tony Falk, Rod Price, and Iceman Parsons.

IN OTHER NEWS ...

The Undertaker and Michelle McCool married at a private ceremony in Houston, Texas ... The Band—Scott Hall, Kevin Nash, and Eric Young—were stripped of the TNA World tag team title due to



There was a lot more to Toni Adams than her beauty



Roxxi gave it her all, but it wasn't enough

Scott Hall's legal problems ... Roxxi was forced to leave TNA after unsuccessfully putting her career on the line against Knockouts champion Madison Rayne at Slammiversary ... During June, stars of the *A-Team* movie (Bradley Cooper, Quinton Jackson, and Sharlto Copley), Mark Feuerstein, and Rob Zombie all served as guest hosts of *Raw* ... Roderick Strong

earned an ROH title match by defeating Steve Corino, Eddie Edwards, Colt Cabana, Shawn Daivari, and Tyson Dux in a Toronto Gauntlet at Death Before Dishonor VIII ... WWE Unified tag team champions The Hart Dynasty successfully defended their title in a bizarre "Viewers' Choice" match against the Great Khali and Hornswoggle on *Raw*.

BUSINESS STORY OF THE MONTH: WWE PARTNERS WITH YOUTUBE

WRESTLER OF THE MONTH: SHEAMUS

It could have been a case of "too much, too soon." When Sheamus' unexpected first WWE title reign ended after he was taken out by Triple-H at the Elimination Chamber PPV in February, he could have taken a big step back.

Remember also that Sheamus fell to Triple-H at WrestleMania 26, the Irishman's first appearance at the sport's biggest show of the year. But he was quick to respond, assaulting and possibly even ending the career of "The Game" with the use of a steel pipe.

From there, Sheamus resumed his equally steely resolve to regain WWE's richest prize, and did well to get himself right back into contention. Still, at the inaugural Fatal 4-Way pay-per-view, he was viewed as the most unlikely competitor to emerge victorious from a showdown with champion John Cena, and perennial contenders Edge and Randy Orton.

It's safe to say that he would never again be underestimated after this night.

And henceforth, it wouldn't be Sheamus' brute force and devastating physicality that would be so revered, as

it would be his cunning. Edge may be the "Ultimate Opportunist," but it was Sheamus who most accurately assessed the situation when The Nexus hit the ring to attack Cena. After both Cena and Edge were taken out, "The Celtic Warrior" swooped in and capitalized, easily pinning Cena.

Regaining the WWE championship in spite of the doubts from his critics had to be gratifying. But equally as pleasing must have been his ability to take the belt from Cena for a second time while beating Edge and the devious Randy Orton at their own games.



Photo by George Napolitano

MATCH OF THE MONTH: TYLER BLACK vs. DAVEY RICHARDS

The main event of Death Before Dishonor VIII was about much more than a championship (albeit one of the most prestigious titles in North America).

For ROH champion Tyler Black, the match was an opportunity to prove himself, to put an exclamation point on a title reign that many felt was not living up to the standards of those that had preceded it.

For Davey Richards, the challenger, it was about fulfillment. Widely regarded as one of the top independent wrestlers in the world, he lacked only the prestigious ROH crown to stake his claim.

Richards set the tone when he refused to shake Black's hand at the opening bell, opting to spit at the champion instead. The crowd was firmly behind Richards, with both men laying in the physicality early and often.

After somehow managing to kick out of Black's God's

Last Gift (package piledriver) finisher, Richards caught Black in a Texas Cloverleaf.

Black escaped after more than a minute of torture and trapped Richards in a small package, but only scored a two-count. This would set off a hellacious exchange that saw both men fire all they could at each other.

Richards leveled Black with double boots and Kawada kicks repeatedly, but Black returned fire with punches, chops, his trademark superkick, and a lariat, as the fans repeatedly chanted, "Match of the Year!"

A near-fall after near-fall sequence culminated when Black hit thrust kick after thrust kick on Richards, who was unable to stand but refused to give up. Finally, Black scored on his third attempt at hitting God's Last Gift, vanquishing Richards, retaining his title, and earning the biggest win of his career to date in the process.

ODDBALL STORY OF THE MONTH: TNA FIRES SCOTT HALL... AGAIN



QUOTES OF THE MONTH

"My personal opinion—and I think the opinion of a lot of fans—is that Vince McMahon simply wanted to stop fans from chanting 'ECW' when they saw someone they either didn't like or they did like, and one of

the most difficult things to sanitize on tape is crowd sound. So if you see the crowd chanting 'ECW' and their fist is pounding three times and they try to sani-

(continued on next page)

QUOTES (continued from previous page)

tize that with crowd cheers, it's very obvious. So, from a production standpoint, I think Vince McMahon thought he had an agenda that he had to adhere to."

—Former ECW champion Shane Douglas, sharing his opinion on why the McMahon-owned ECW was so different from the original during an interview on AOL Fanhouse

"To hell with the fans. I rehabbed the injury and got my revenge on [Chris] Jericho for myself, not them. That's what I've always done. When I came back after rehabbing my neck surgery about seven years ago, I realized that if I didn't help myself, no one would do it for me. It was the same this time around."

—Edge, explaining his motives for turning on the fans after being cheered upon his return from injury, "Press Conference," PWI, September 2010

"Who are you to question my lineage as German heavyweight champion? Let's just say top men have decided to make me *das champion*. I repeat, because most of you Americans are either too deaf or dumb to understand what a superior German athlete says, top men!"

—Indy wrestler Josef Von Schmidt, after being asked about the lineage of his billing as German champion, "12 Questions," PWI, September 2010

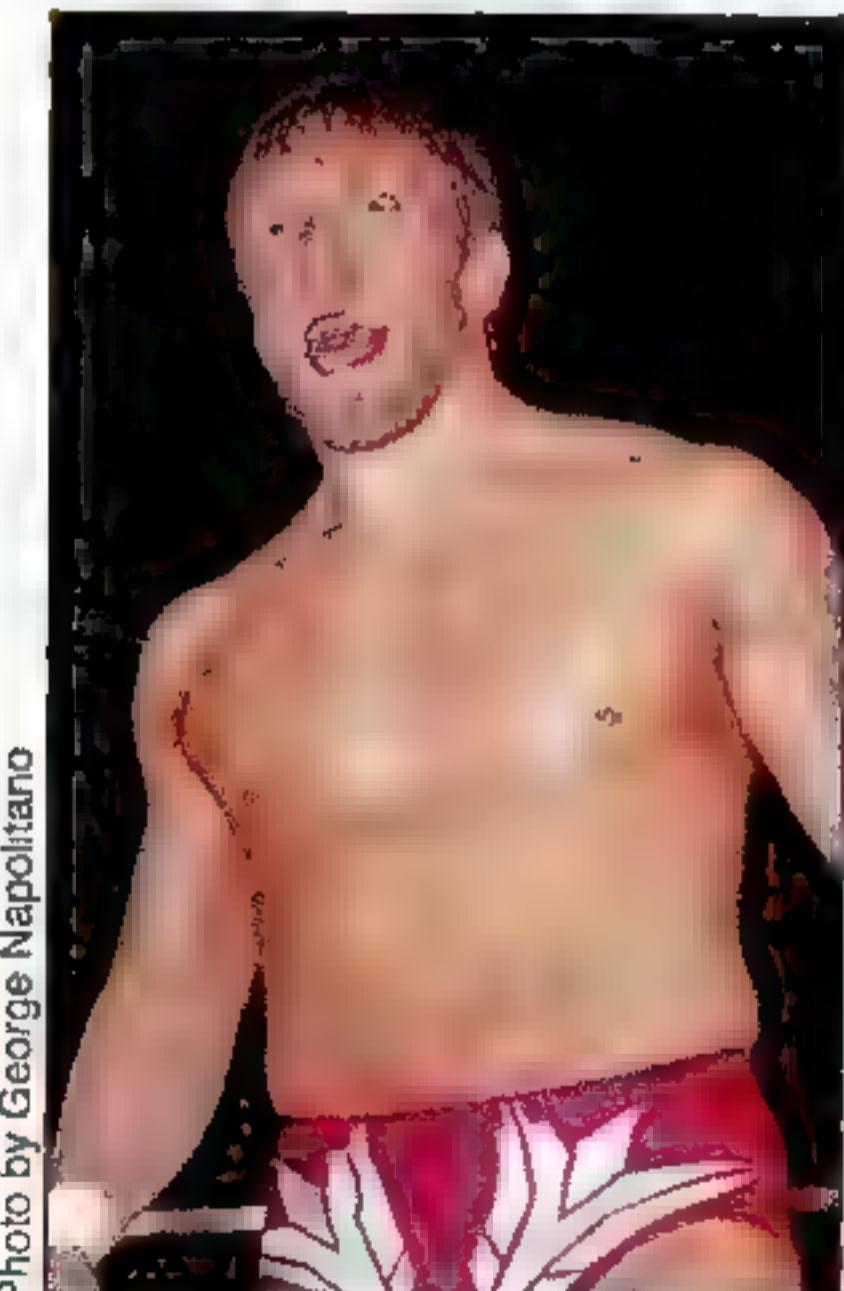


Photo by George Napolitano

"As far as what happens after 90 days, nobody knows. I've 'heard' that TNA is Interested. There are petitions going around to get me back into WWE and the last several weeks there have been fans chanting my names at their shows."

—Bryan Danielson, responding to questions about his future after being fired by WWE, bryandanielson.com

"It broke my heart. I admit it. I had given so much of my life to this and sacrificed so much. I missed weddings, birthdays, my nieces being born. I starved on the road when I first tried to make it. I slept at rest stops because I didn't have the money for a hotel. I wanted it that bad."

—Mickie James, discussing being released by WWE two months earlier and her passion for the business, scrippsnews.com

WINNERS AND LOSERS

WINNERS

SHEAMUS: The new

"Ultimate Opportunist"?

WADE BARRETT: Breath

behind the winds of change

TYLER BLACK: Acceptance, at last!

REY MYSTERIO JR.: Sweet redemption

ROB VAN DAM: High times atop TNA

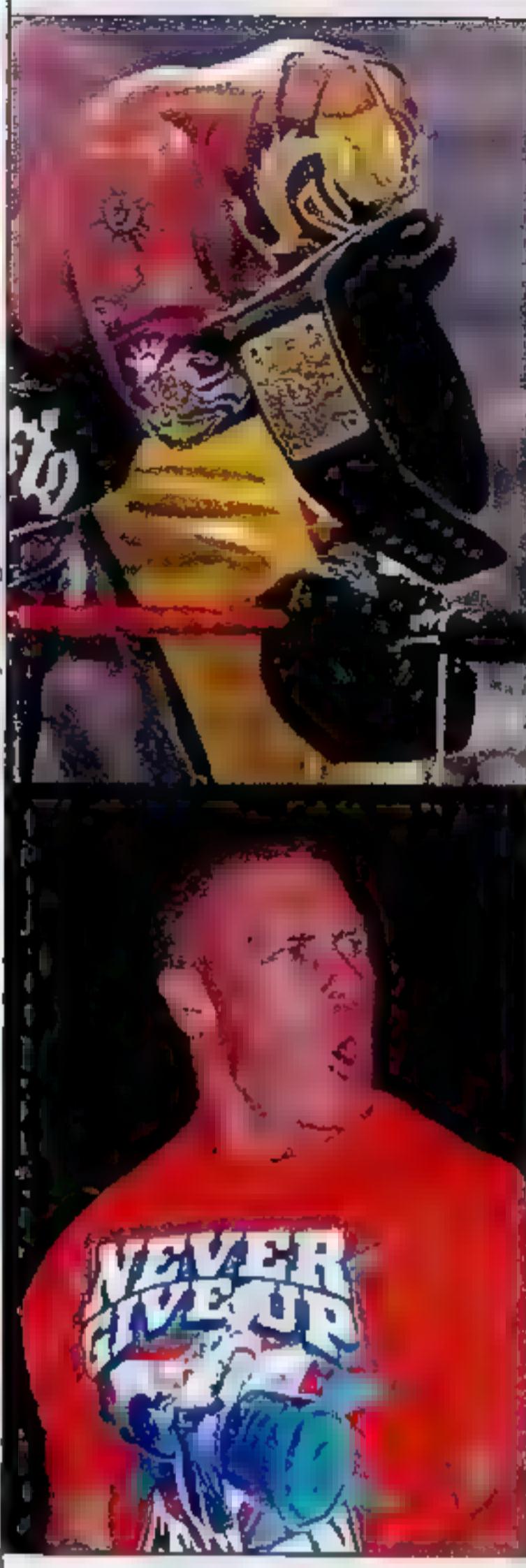


Photo by George Napolitano

Photo by George Napolitano

LOSERS

JOHN CENA: Target on his back growing bigger, and bigger ...

DANIEL BRYAN: Say "no" to necktie violence

JACK SWAGGER: All-American American former champ

SCOTT HALL: Personal woes broke up The Band

ROXXI: Title shot not worth risking career

"To clarify. I will not be making an announcement about how TNA will change forever. You will just see for yourselves in the coming weeks. However, there is still a nice surprise for tonight's Slammiversary pay-per-view."

—TNA President Dixie Carter, scrambling to cover for yet another premature "major announcement" via her Twitter account

"Young wrestling announcers need to rely on their instincts and their 'feel for the game' more than the need to force feed me how many titles so and so has won, which more often than not come at the wrong place at the wrong time. Feel the game ... emotionally invest in the process and allow the proceedings to come to you."

—Hall of Fame announcer Jim Ross, giving advice to those looking to follow in his footsteps, jrsbarbecue.com

"I have no idea where that was going to go. Pretty Ricky belonged to Vince McMahon. Believe it or not, Pretty Ricky is still lurking around places. You may see him pop in and out from time to time. He's definitely not gone. He's a mac from way back. He's a playa from the Himalaya. He's just chillin', I think."

—R-Truth, discussing the short-lived Pretty Ricky character in WWE, *The Baltimore Sun*



WRESTLING ANNUAL

THE MIZ

FOR A Future Championship

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WRESTLING IN JULY

BY COMPTON'S Dan Murphy

ONCE UPON A time, the wrestling world went into a bit of a lull between WrestleMania and SummerSlam. Those days are long gone, as July 2010 turned out to be one of the most turbulent months of the year.

The month featured WWE's first-ever Money in the Bank pay-per-view. With guaranteed title shots awaiting the winners of the Raw and Smackdown ladder matches, there were opportunities for new title contenders to emerge and champions were wary ... for good reason, as it turned out.

In TNA, Rob Van Dam was hitting his stride as World champion, but he had a long list of contenders jockeying for title shots. At any given moment, he might have to face such world-class talent as AJ Styles, Mr. Anderson, or Kurt Angle.

But the biggest question on the mind of TNA fans had to be "what's going on with all these ECW guys?" With Tommy Dreamer, Raven, and other ECW originals showing up in the Impact Zone, rumors began swirling that Paul Heyman was coming in to take creative control of the promotion. Could ECW's mad genius co-exist with the likes of Vince Russo, Hulk Hogan, and Eric Bischoff? Would Dixie Carter cede the type of control a man like Heyman would demand?

Some wrestlers found strength in numbers, with factions like Nexus, the Straight-Edge Society, Ric Flair's new Fortune group, and the yet-to-

be-named ECW crew banding together for the common good.

By month's end, a new WWE World champion was crowned, an "awesome" contender was waiting in the wings on Raw, and an extreme powder keg was set to go off in TNA. So much for the dog days of summer!

KANE WINS MITB, TAKES WORLD TITLE

Kane had competed in two previous Money in the Bank ladder matches (at WrestleMania 25 and WrestleMania 26), and his powerful-but-plodding style proved to be his Achilles heel. At the Money in the Bank pay-per-view, however, a focused and determined Kane was looking to make a major statement and avenge the mysterious attack on his brother, The Undertaker.

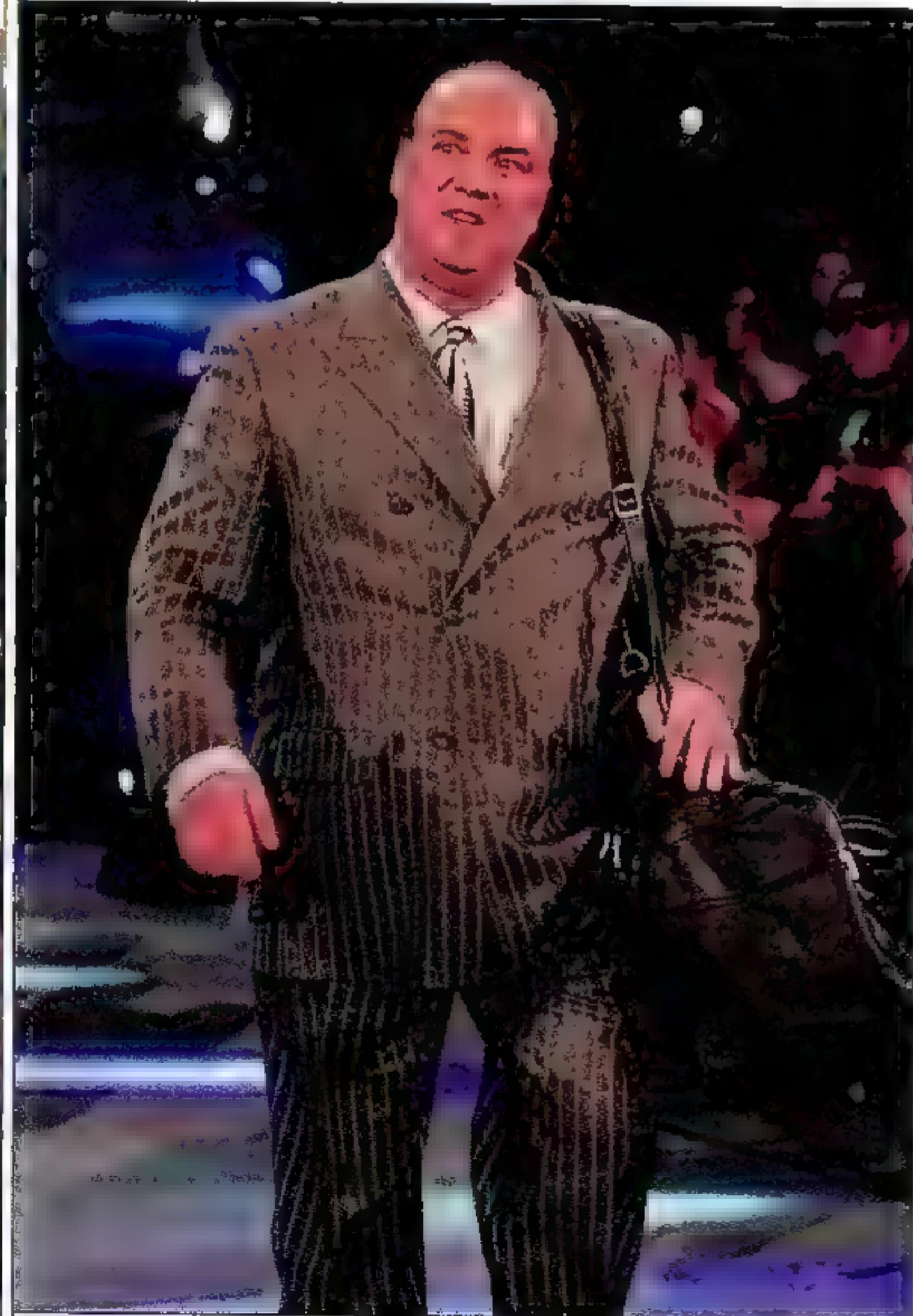
Kane was one of eight wrestlers who qualified for the Smackdown Money in

Money in the Bank turned into gold around Kane's waist



TNA PRESIDENT DIXIE CARTER GRABBED A MICROPHONE AND PLED FOR THE FIGHTING TO STOP. 'I INVITED THEM,' CARTER ANNOUNCED, REFERRING TO THE ECW CONTINGENT, SURPRISING TNA WRESTLERS AND FANS.

Negotiations with TNA fell through



the Bank match, along with The Big Show, Christian, Matt Hardy, Dolph Ziggler, Cody Rhodes, Kofi Kingston, and Drew McIntyre. Kane proved to be the smartest competitor in the match, attacking opponents when they were most vulnerable (climbing the ladder) and spending a considerable amount of time outside the ring as the smaller, quicker contestants punished each other with jarring high-impact moves. At the 27:00 mark, Kane threw McIntyre from the ladder and climbed up to claim the MITB briefcase containing the guaranteed World title shot.

Barely 30 minutes ladder, Kane opted to cash in that title shot.

After World champion Rey Mysterio Jr. pinned challenger Jack Swagger, Swagger hooked the champion in a painful anklelock. Kane ran down to ringside, apparently to end the assault before Mysterio suffered a major injury. But after chasing off Swagger, Kane demanded to have his title match. Kane immediately went after Mysterio's injured ankle, then connected with a chokeslam and a Tombstone piledriver. After 54 seconds of carnage, Kane

pinned Mysterio to win the World title. This was the second world championship of Kane's career; he held the WWF championship for one day in 1998 (the ECW title was not recognized as a world championship by the editors of *PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED* during Kane's 2008 reign).

TNA CHANNELS ECW, ANNOUNCES HARDCORE JUSTICE

After weeks of appearing in the audience during episodes of *Impact*, Tommy Dreamer and his group of ECW alumni got involved in the action,

prompting many to wonder whether the ECW invaders were the mysterious "They" that Abyss had been alluding to.

On the July 15 edition of *Impact*, a confrontation between champion Rob Van Dam and Abyss turned ugly, with Abyss hitting a chokeslam and threatening to attack him with "Janice," his nail-studded weapon. Mick Foley appeared on the entrance ramp, momentarily distracting Abyss, which allowed Dreamer, Rhino, Richards, and Raven to run into the ring to end the assault.

That prompted security and members of the TNA locker room, followed by road agents and even the police. Apparently, ECW roots run deep, as Team 3-D and front office members Pat "Simon Diamond" Kenney and Al Snow joined Dreamer's group.

TNA President Dixie Carter grabbed a microphone and pled for the fighting to stop. "I invited them," Carter announced, referring to the ECW contingent, surprising TNA wrestlers and fans.

The following week, an emotional Dreamer asked Carter if she would give the ECW alumni "one night" for their own pay-per-view.

"This is not about an ECW invasion," he said. "This is not about us taking over. This is about men and women who lost their jobs, whose lives were affected by it. This is for the fans that chant it, for my friends who lived it—that our legacy is not destroyed. I beg of you, give us one night to show the world what we had and our legacy can live forever."

Carter acquiesced and announced that the Hard Justice pay-per-view would take on an ECW theme, christening the event Hardcore Justice.

AJ STYLES BEATS ROB TERRY, BECOMES FIRST TNA TV CHAMPION

Though frequently criticized for his one-dimensional style and lack of technical prowess, Rob Terry proved to be a dominant Global heavyweight champion, but his title reign came to an end on the July 22 edition of *Impact*.

Still frustrated from his World title loss to Rob Van Dam, Styles was determined to regain championship gold and

WRESTLING CHRIS WYLDE VS TOMMASO CIANFRANCO ECWA Super B Tournament Final

ANDREW SWYLDE VS TOMMASO GIANNUCCIO CHRIS SWYLDE (Tournament) EGWA Super B Tournament July 10, 2010

EGNA SUPER

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Guns outdueled
Beer Money



secure his spot as the cornerstone of Fortune. To ensure he got the job, he recruited fellow Fortune member Kazarian to accompany him to ringside. It didn't take long for Kazarian to make his presence felt.

Terry immediately took the upper hand in the bout, using his freakish power to manhandle the former World champion. Terry dropped Styles with a gorilla press slam and then connected with a stiff spin kick, seemingly putting him in position to earn the biggest victory of his career. Kazarian distracted the referee to prevent the pinfall, however. The big Welshman attempted a vertical suplex, but Kazarian reached into the ring and tripped him, allowing Styles to fall on top of Terry. With Kazarian hanging on to Terry's feet to prevent a kick-out, the referee counted to three and awarded the Global championship to Styles.

The following week, Fortune founder Ric Flair announced that the Global championship would now be referred to as the Television championship and that it would be defended regularly on *Impact*. The name change hearkened back to Jim Crockett Promotions, which recognized a TV championship as one of its most prestigious titles. That championship was held by both Tully Blanchard and Arn Anderson, and it was a prize that The Four Horseman fiercely protected.

HEYMAN/TNA NEGOTIATIONS FALL THROUGH

Everywhere you looked, there seemed to be yet another rumor making the rounds that Paul Heyman was negotiating an agreement with TNA. With the arrival of Tommy Dreamer and his fellow ECW alumni, the atmosphere certainly seemed right for a Heyman comeback. His exact role in the company seemed to depend on which website you were reading and which day of the week it was.

Heyman did meet with Dixie Carter in early-July. However, Heyman and the TNA president were unable to reach an agreement, and the ECW reunion took place without the architect of the original Extreme Championship Wrestling.

Heyman offered his side of the story a few months later in an interview with mmafighting.com.

"It came real close with TNA. To me, it was more of a deal with Spike TV, and then a stock and ownership deal involving TNA," Heyman said. "I had a five-year plan. I was going to spend 18 months building the roster, the next 18 months exploiting that built roster, that's three years in, go public in three, stay for two more running it and get out at 50 [years old]. That was my plan ... When that didn't happen, that was it. I didn't have any other interest in doing it."

MOTOR CITY MACHINE GUNS WIN VACANT TAG TITLE

For the past few years, Chris Sabin and Alex Shelley have built a reputation as one of the most exciting and talented tag teams in wrestling. Though lauded by critics and fans, The Motor City Machine Guns had been haunted by their inability to win the TNA tag team title.

That changed at Victory Road.

The TNA tag team title had been declared vacant when Scott Hall and Sean Waltman were unable to defend the belts. At Victory Road, rivals Beer Money and the Guns squared off, with the vacant championship hanging in the balance.

Shelley and Sabin took the early advantage, using their quickness and

WRESTLING

BRIAN KENDRICK vs. DOUGLAS WILLIAMS

TNA Victory Road, July 11, 2010

PHOTOGRAPH BY SOUTHERN TNA PHOTOGRAPHY





Creed takes the 2010 Super 8

CREED UTILIZED HIS QUICKNESS AND PRECISION TO KEEP CIAMPA OFF-BALANCE AND WAS ABLE TO SCORE THE PINFALL ... WINNING THE 2010 SUPER 8 TOURNAMENT.

teamwork to work over Robert Roode's left arm. But Roode scored with a low blow on Shelley, and he and James Storm took control of the pace of the match, systematically working over Shelley. Finally, Shelley managed to tag in Sabin, who floored Roode with a tornado DDT.

From there, both teams traded desperation high-risk moves. The fast and frenetic pacing gave the advantage to the Guns, as Beer Money was caught flat-footed and off-guard. Storm spit beer into the eyes of referee Brian Hebner, spurring senior official Earl Hebner,

Newark, Delaware. The field of eight contenders included former WWE tag team champion Nick "U-Gene" Dinsmore, former TNA star Austin "Consequences" Creed, Scott Wright, Brian Milonas, Chris Wylde, Chase Del Monte, Alex Reynolds, and 2009 Super 8 finalist Tommaso Ciampa.

Creed overcame a 130-pound weight disadvantage with a victory over Milonas, advancing to the semifinals, where he met U-Gene (who had advanced with a win over Wright). The match pitted the tournament's two best-known and most popular participants

to run to the ring. With two referees, controversy was bound to ensue.

The Hebners counted simultaneous pinfalls. After a few moments of confusion, the referees decided that the match should be re-started. Beer Money immediately charged the Guns, but Shelley and Sabin turned it around and managed to hit the Skull and Bones neck-breaker/cross-bodyblock to score the pinfall and claim the championship.

The Guns won their first TNA tag championship, but Beer Money claimed they had been robbed, setting the stage for a thrilling best-of-five series between the teams.

AUSTIN "CONSEQUENCES" CREED WINS THE SUPER 8

The ECWA Super 8 Tournament is one of the most prestigious independent events of the year, and has helped launch Christopher Daniels, The Hardy Boyz, Low-Ki (Kaval), Davey Richards, and many more to the national stage.

The 14th annual Super 8 took place on July 10 in

against one another. Despite U-Gene's advantage in size and experience, Creed was able to score the upset victory to advance to the finals.

However, the biggest challenge still awaited him. For the second consecutive year, Ciampa had made it to the finals, and the very aggressive and physical Bostonian was eager to avenge last year's loss to Nick Logan and claim the coveted Super 8 trophy.

Creed utilized his quickness and precision to keep Ciampa off-balance and was able to score the pinfall, beating Ciampa and winning the 2010 Super 8 tournament.

Apparently, WWE officials were impressed. Two weeks after his Super 8 victory, it was announced that Creed has signed a WWE developmental contract.

The event also proved to be the swansong for ECWA promoter Jim Kettner, who announced his retirement from wrestling after a 43-year career. Michael Tartaglia was named as the new ECWA promoter.

"MYSTERY WOMAN" CLOUDS KNOCKOUTS TITLE PICTURE

After weeks of fighting off two- and three-on-one attacks by The Beautiful People, Angelina Love finally got the stipulation she wanted. At Victory Road, she would receive a one-on-one title match against champion Madison Rayne. If any member of The Beautiful People interfered in the bout and caused a disqualification, Love would win the Knockouts title. However, if Rayne managed to beat Love, Love would be forced to retire.

Love immediately took charge of the match, dominating the champion and sending Rayne fleeing from the ring for a respite. Frustrated, Rayne brought a chair into the ring, but Love kicked it into her face. It looked like Rayne's reign was coming to an end.

At that point, a mystery woman rode to the ring on a motorcycle. With her face covered by an enormous helmet, she attacked Love outside the ring, forcing the referee to disqualify Rayne and declare Love the new

Knockouts champion.

Rayne protested the decision, claiming that the masked woman was not a member of The Beautiful People, and therefore that the DQ stipulation was not in effect. On the July 22 edition of *Impact*, TNA officials announced that they agreed with Rayne. Since they could not prove the mystery assailant was either Lacey Von Erich or Velvet Sky, they were forced to return the championship to Rayne.

The mystery woman—and her special relationship with Rayne—caused friction within The Beautiful People. Eventually, Rayne and the mysterious biker (who later was revealed as Tara) broke away from the group and went their own way.

BRET HART RETURNS, JOINS TEAM WWE

John Cena had his hands full trying to find allies in his war against Wade Barrett and The Nexus. After spurning Barrett's offer to join the group, Cena was forced to find six partners to join him in a seven-on-seven bout at SummerSlam. But between Nexus' attacks and the bad blood Cena had with several prospective teammates, finding a group of partners proved to be a challenge. Cena needed an elder statesman who could bring the team together, if only for one night.

"The Hitman" proved to be the right man for the job.

On the July 19 edition of *Raw*, Cena introduced Team WWE. He called out Edge, John Morrison, R-Truth, The Great Khali, and Chris Jericho, and then introduced Bret "The Hitman" Hart, who had been out of action since being

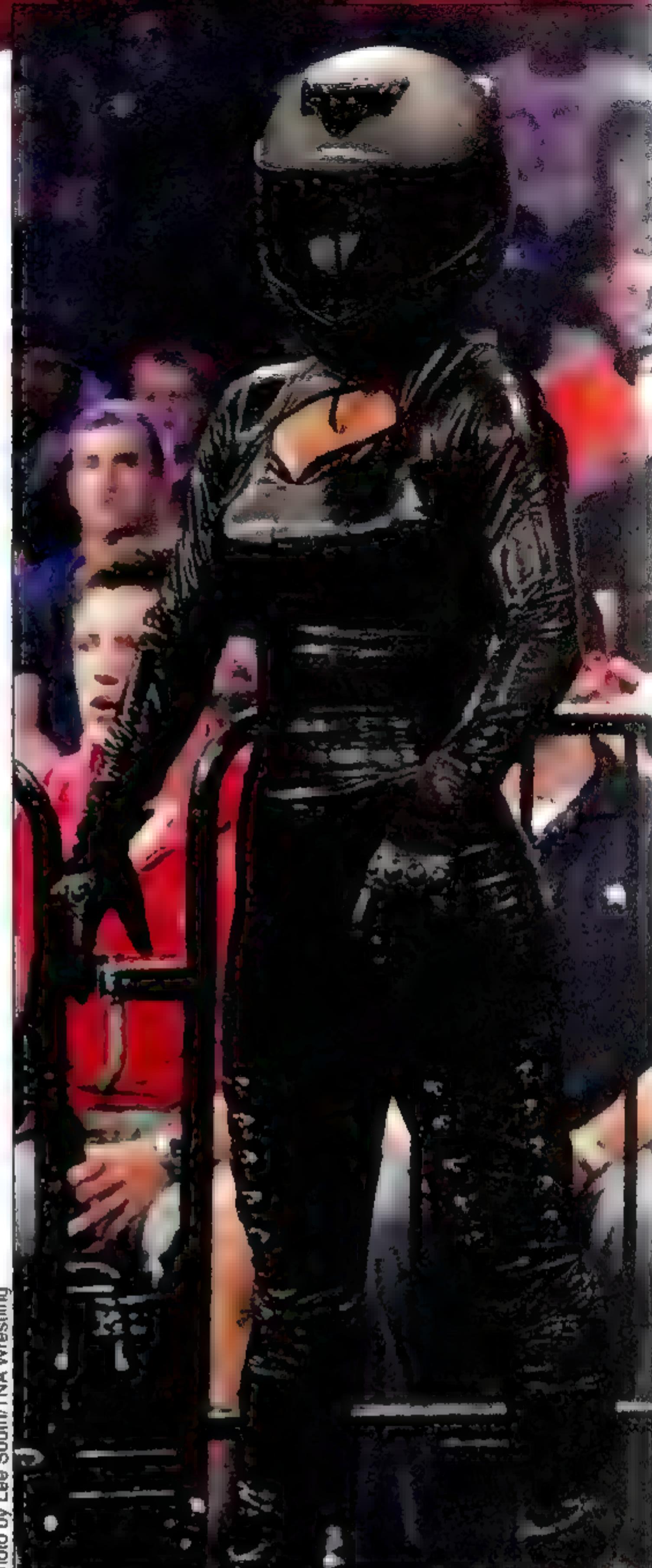


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

TNA's mystery woman:
Helmethhead, a.k.a. Tara

**AT THAT POINT,
A MYSTERY
WOMAN RODE
TO THE RING ON
A MOTORCYCLE.**



Photo by George Napolitano

Bret joins Team Raw

attacked by Nexus in June. Cena's team charged the ring and ran off The Nexus, giving Team WWE a psychological boost headed into SummerSlam.

Team WWE would change over the weeks leading up to SummerSlam, but Hart's presence helped give the team the veteran leadership and motivation it needed to survive against Nexus. Hart also helped keep the peace between Cena and Edge and Jericho, as the latter two Canadians respected Hart and agreed to a temporary peace with Cena. Hart wasn't a figurehead, either. He took an active role in fighting with Nexus and proved he could still hold his own when needed.

TRENT ACID HONORED WITH "ACID-FEST" TRIBUTE SHOW

Michael "Trent Acid" Verdi lived to wrestle. On July 10, some of his closest friends gathered at the former ECW Arena to pay tribute to him and to celebrate his legacy and his passion for the sport.

More than 600 fans attended "Acid-Fest," a fundraising event to help raise money for Verdi's family. All wrestlers reportedly performed without pay and donated money for the cause. Combat Zone Wrestling promoted the event.

"Acid-Fest" featured a veritable who's who of Northeast indie talent, including Acid's longtime Backseat Boys tag team partner Johnny Kashmere, Homi-

cide, The S.A.T., The Carnage Crew, Sonjay Dutt, Missy Hyatt, Mahoney, and more.

It was announced that Verdi was inducted into the ECW Arena Hardcore Hall of Fame, which was a special honor, as he had attended ECW shows in that building as a fan and gone on to headline cards there during his wrestling career. John Cena donated a watch designed to resemble the spinner WWE title belt, which was auctioned at the event.

Former ECW promoter Tod Gordon and Lou E. Dangerously presented Verdi's mother with a lifetime achievement award plaque in honor of her son. In the main event, Kashmere defeated Devon Moore in an emotional bout.

At the end of the event, Missy Sampson presented Verdi's mother with a check for \$7,540 to offset funeral costs and other expenses.

Trent Acid was a polarizing figure who had plenty of friends and enemies. On this night, old disputes were put aside as wrestlers and fans came together in a special tribute to a wrestler who, less than a month earlier, had passed away at age 29.

TNA DRAWS MORE THAN 5,000 FANS TO NYC HOUSE SHOW

TNA ventured outside of the Impact Zone for a major house show in Brooklyn, New York, on July 2. New York has

MICHAEL "TRENT ACID" VERDI LIVED TO WRESTLE. ON JULY 10, SOME OF HIS CLOSEST FRIENDS GATHERED AT THE FORMER ECW ARENA TO PAY TRIBUTE TO HIM AND TO CELEBRATE HIS LEGACY AND HIS PASSION FOR THE SPORT.

long been a WWE stronghold, and it can be difficult for a promotion other than WWE to draw in "The Big Apple."

TNA came loaded for bear and delivered a main event that had the NYC crowd (reported at about 5,500) chanting "This is awesome!"

The event was held outdoors at MCU Park, the home of the Brooklyn Cyclones minor league baseball team. On the undercard, Amazing Red won a four-way X division match, Angelina Love beat Madison Rayne, Kurt Angle beat Desmond Wolfe, Jeff Hardy beat Abyss in a Monster's Ball match, and Team 3-D beat Ink Inc.

Prior to the main event, AJ Styles got on the bad side of the hometown crowd by announcing that he hates New York City. Styles channeled that hatred by wrestling an aggressive match against TNA World champion RVD. Styles and Van Dam traded offensive attacks, suicide dives, and signature moves in a back-and-forth bout that held the fans captivated.

Styles took over outside the ring, slamming Van Dam's head into the ring apron, then brutalizing the champion with precision kicks. Styles went for the Styles Clash, but Van Dam countered with a back bodydrop.

RVD took control, hitting a spinning heel kick and a rolling thunder splash, then vaulting to the top rope for a splash. Styles caught him on the ropes and attempted a superplex, but Van Dam managed to shove Styles from his perch and send him crashing to the canvas. From there, one Five-Star Frog Splash was all it took for Van Dam to secure the pinfall.

With a terrific match, Van Dam and Styles capped off a watershed night for TNA, which won over the NYC faithful with a memorable card.

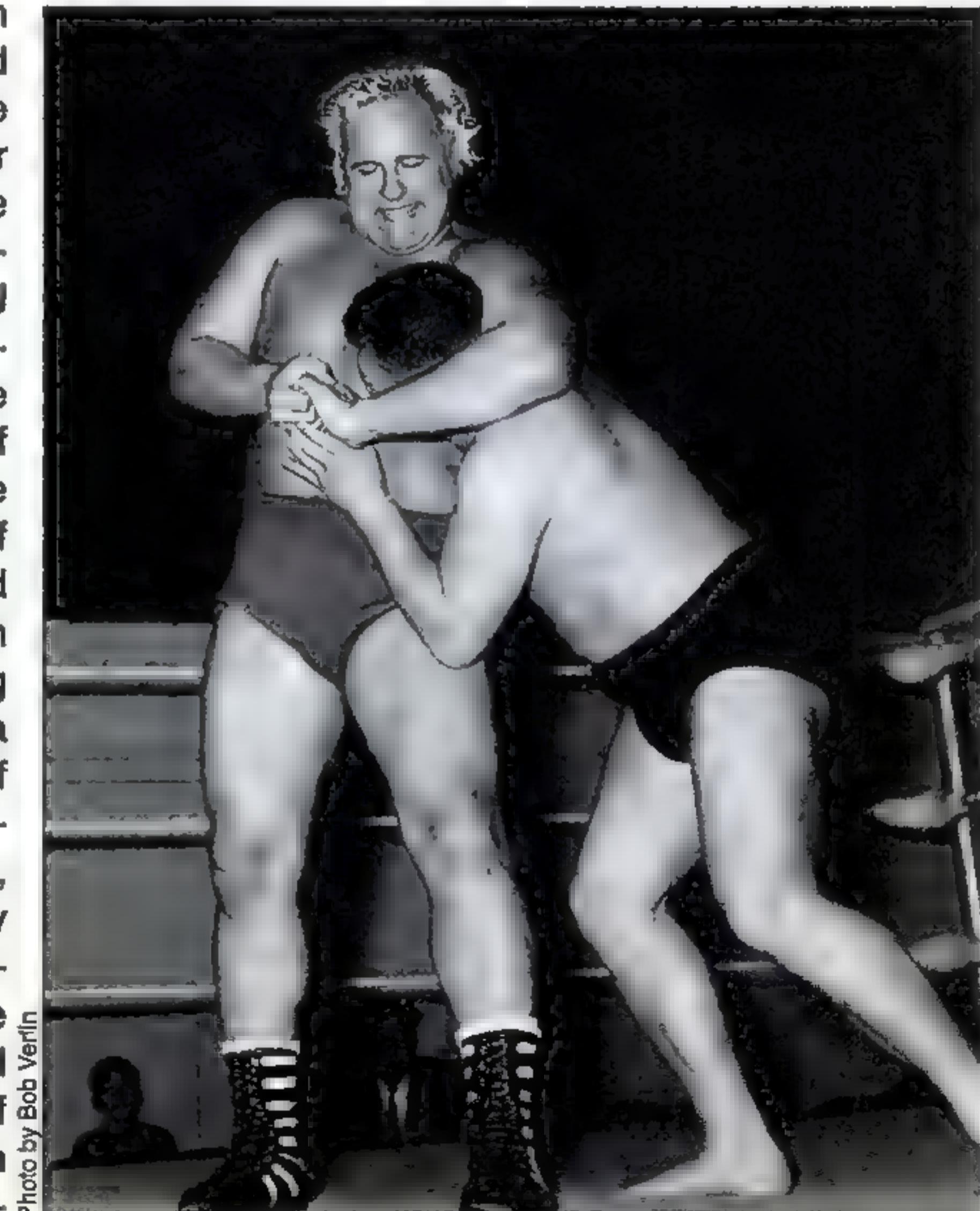
IN OTHER NEWS ...

The Miz won the Raw Money in the Bank ladder match to guarantee a WWE title shot, giving him ample reason to brag about how awesome he is ... In other MITB matches, Alicia Fox defeated Eve, The Hart Dynasty beat the Uso Brothers, Layla defeated Kelly Kelly, and Sheamus defeated John

Cena, with help from Nexus ... Sheamus lulled Cena into a false sense of confidence by teasing he would align with him to battle Nexus ... Brock Lesnar returned from a life-threatening battle with diverticulitis, and defeated interim UFC champion Shane Carwin to reclaim the UFC championship at UFC 116 ... At Victory Road, Rob Van Dam successfully defended the TNA World title against Jeff Hardy, Mr. Anderson, and Abyss ... In other Victory Road bouts, Douglas Williams beat Brian Kendrick in an Ultimate-X match, Brother Ray beat Brother Devon and Jesse Neal in a three-way, AJ Styles and Kazarian beat Samoa Joe and Rob Terry, Hernandez defeated Matt Morgan, Jay Lethal beat Ric Flair, and Kurt Angle defeated "Pope" D'Angelo Dinero ... WWE Hall of Famer Rick Steamboat continued to convalesce after suffering a brain aneurysm and was released from the hospital in late-July ... The July 30 edition of *Smackdown* from Corpus Christi, Texas, saw a no-DQ bout between Rey Mysterio Jr. and Jack Swagger spill outside the arena, through traffic, and end with Mysterio knocking Swagger into the Gulf of Mexico. Kane then chokeslammed Mysterio into the Gulf ... Ric Flair announced the formation of Fortune, naming AJ Styles and Kazarian as the first members of his new stable ... The team of Taiyo Kea and Akebono won the All Japan tag team title ... In a rare instance of inter-promotional cooperation, the Ohio Valley Wrestling Southern tag team title was defended on a Ring of Honor card in Louisville, Ken-

PRIOR TO THE MAIN EVENT, AJ STYLES GOT ON THE BAD SIDE OF THE HOMETOWN CROWD BY ANNOUNCING THAT HE HATES NEW YORK CITY.

Stanlee against Duke Keomuka in 1963



tucky ... The July 12 edition of *Raw* turned out to be a "Very Brady" special as Florence Carol "Brady" Henderson served as guest host. Naturally, she ended up making out with The Great Khali ... "Mr. America" Steve Stanlee

died on July 2 at the age of 90 ... The Big Show had a penchant for unmasking Straight-Edge superstars, taking the hoods off SES members CM Punk (revealing his bald pate) and Joey Mercury.

BUSINESS STORY OF THE MONTH: WWE INVADES COMIC-CON SAN DIEGO

Comic book and sci-fi fans got a glimpse of the WWE Universe at San Diego Comic-Con International, held July 22-25. Kane, John Morrison, The Miz, Melina, the Bella Twins, and Chris Masters were on hand to meet and greet fans and sign autographs.

Comic-Con has developed into a major event, attracting movie and TV stars, as well as and video game, comic book, and science fiction fanatics.

WWE also presented a joint panel featuring WWE writers and executives from Mattel. Writers Brian Gewirtz and Ed Kosky provided fans with a rare glimpse inside the workings of WWE, including aspects of the creative process and how television scripts are written and approved.

In a surprise move, Mattel announced that it would be releasing classic action figures of "Macho Man" Randy Savage and The Ultimate Warrior, both of whom have had fractured relationships with WWE. The announcement sparked rumors that Savage and/or Warrior might be head-

ed for induction in the WWE Hall of Fame in 2011.

Adding even more fuel to those rumors was the "Macho Man" himself, who addressed the Comic-Con attendees in a special video presentation. Savage showed off his "Defining Moments" Mattel action figure (from his WrestleMania 7 match against Warrior). "Mattel's partnership with WWE is unbelievable. They're going to be the ultimate tag team of all-time! Oh yeah," Savage said. He also promised that 2011 would be "the Macho Man's year."

Also at the convention were Steve Austin (promoting his films *Stranger* and *Hunt To Kill*) and Jerry Lawler and Christopher Daniels, who promoted the wrestling-themed comic book *Headlocked*.

WRESTLER OF THE MONTH: KANE

The moment Kane "discovered" his half-brother, The Undertaker, in a so-called "vegetative state," he went on one of the most impressive winning streaks of his career. Kane was truly the most dominant wrestler in the game throughout July as he strong-armed Jack Swagger, Rey Mysterio Jr., and every other Smackdown superstar who made the mistake of getting in his way.

The highlight of Kane's month came at the Money in the Bank pay-per-view, where he won the MITB match, then cashed in his title shot and destroyed Mysterio to capture his second world championship.

Throughout his WWE career, Kane has been inconsistent. While always dangerous, he has been known to slip into lengthy slumps. The summer of 2010 was a true breakout for him. He proved that he could channel his rage into championship success and that he could survive as champion for more than just one day.

In addition to his in-ring success, Kane also delivered some memorable promos throughout the summer, slowly revealing a truly twisted and demented mind. He tried to



Photo by George Napolitano

pin the blame for Undertaker's attack on Mysterio and tried to portray himself as an avenging angel of destruction.

Kane's mental state notwithstanding, there can be no denying that July 2010 was one of the most successful months of his career. He proved that he's still a main-event talent and a viable World title contender.

MATCH OF THE MONTH: BRYAN DANIELSON vs. SHINGO

On July 24, Dragon Gate USA taped "Enter The Dragon 2010," the company's one-year anniversary show. The fans who filled the former ECW Arena in Philadelphia were treated to a bona fide Match of the Year contender as Bryan Danielson clashed with Shingo Takagi, a 28-year-old former bodybuilder.

Unfortunately, due to Danielson's non-compete clause with WWE, the match could not be broadcast on the pay-per-view, meaning only the fans in attendance had the opportunity to see one of the most critically lauded matches of 2010.

Fresh off his WWE release, Danielson was a clear crowd favorite, with a loud and passionate audience cheering him on.

Shingo and Danielson pushed each other to the limit, exchanging punishing submission holds and dangerous high-impact slams. Shingo crushed Danielson with a twisting Samoan drop off the second turnbuckle and punished "The American Dragon" with stiff lariats and pumphandle drivers. Danielson fought back with jiu-jitsu triangle



chokes, MMA-inspired elbowsmashes, and even used his old Cattle Mutilation finisher, but was unable to gain the submission.

As fans loudly chanted, "Match of the Year!" Danielson and Shingo exchanged near-falls. Shingo connected with an explosive Stay Dream top rope Olympic slam, but Danielson managed to kick out of the cover. After a grueling back-and-forth battle that had the fans on their feet, Danielson finally caught Shingo in a LeBell Lock to earn the submission victory.

ODDBALL STORY OF THE MONTH: HOGAN AND FRIENDS TAKE THE STAGE... IN COQUITLAM, BC?

Here's an idea whose time has come: A Hulk Hogan variety show.

Err... maybe not.

The *Hulk Hogan And Friends Tour* kicked off on July 18, not in Los Angeles, New York, or Chicago, but in the sleepy Vancouver suburb of Coquitlam, British Columbia, Canada.

According to a press release sent out by tour organizers, the tour was "on the road and making stops at casinos and venues across the country," though only two events have taken place through 2010.

Longtime pals The Nasty Boys, Jimmy Hart, Brutus Beefcake, Greg Valentine, Koko B. Ware, and The Honky Tonk Man joined Hogan for a performance at The Red Robinson Show Theatre. With "The Mouth Of The South" serving as emcee, the wrestlers took the stage and answered fan questions for two hours.

Among the highlights of the event, Hogan said he didn't think The Ultimate Warrior deserved to be inducted into

the WWE Hall of Fame. Koko B. Ware talked about the time Frankie flew away from him at Madison Square Garden, and The Honky Tonk Man performed "Cool, Cocky, and Bad," his old WWF theme song. Naturally, there were plenty of tall tales ever hear about how Hogan slammed the "700-pound" Andre the Giant?

Though the Coquitlam event was well received by those fans who attended, the tour concept fell victim to its own hype.

Casinos all over the world and Fortune 500 corporations have expressed interest in booking the tour, Darren Prince, the marketing guru who promoted the event, claimed in a press release. However, other than the Coquitlam event and a November show in Green Bay, Wisconsin, the official web site (hulkandfriends.com) does not list any more stops on the tour itinerary.

Maybe they should recruit Randy Savage to perform his rap single "Be A Man."

QUOTES OF THE MONTH

"I believe Owen would turn in his grave watching Martha erase every single thing he ever did, all for spite. Martha Hart needs to celebrate Owen's memory as much as possible, not to block it away forever. How stupid and selfish is that? I personally believe Martha Hart has done nothing to keep his memory alive and sadly, he fades from view a little more every year ... I do suspect this lawsuit is more about publicity, ego, and small-mindedness than it is about pro wrestling and all of those that are in it."

—Bret Hart, on his Facebook page, ripping on Martha Hart over her lawsuit regarding WWE's use of Owen Hart's name and likeness

"I kept seeing so many similarities between the original ECW and TNA. The original ECW was a place where men and women who were unknown became legends, where legends in the wrestling business came to re-invent their career. Long before Samoa Joe was dumping people on their heads and choking them out, there was Taz doing it everywhere. What Ric Flair did for Jay Lethal, Terry Funk did for me and for Mick Foley. Before The Beautiful People, there were Francine and Beulah McGillicutty."

—Tommy Dreamer, speaking on the parallels between ECW and TNA, on *Impact*

"I'm just looking to uphold a fine reputation for instilling terror, just like the original Sheik before me."

—Joseph "The Sheik" Cabibbo, telling PWI Contributing Writer Brady Hicks why he adopted The Sheik's name

"Life is real short. You got to keep doing your thing, shakin' and groovin'. If you got the dime, best believe I got the good time, baby. Let me hear ya say 'uhh-uhh, oh yeah!' Come and get yourself Percy-fied, that's what I'm talkin' about."

—NXT Season Two contender Percy Watson, doing his best Kool-Aid Man impression in the *NXT* open mike contest

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WINNERS AND LOSERS

WINNERS

KANE: Winning the big gold belt in honor of his brother (*wink, wink*)

JAY LETHAL: Huge win over "The Nature Boy" was a career highlight

TOMMY DREAMER: Proving once again that hardcore will never die

THE MIZ: Awesome win for a truly annoying wrestler.

AUSTIN CREED: A Super 8 trophy and a WWE deal? Not a bad month!



Photo by George Napolitano



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

LOSERS

JOHN CENA: Haunted by Nexus and tormented by Sheamus

ANGELINA LOVE: Screwed out of the Knockouts title on a technicality

TOMMASO CIAMPA: Is this guy ever going to win the Super 8?

KEVIN STEEN: Got a shot at Tyler Black's gold, but couldn't get the job done

DARREN YOUNG: Took a big-time beating from Cena and got booted out of Nexus

"At one point, I wanted to be released. I'm glad Dixie Carter refused to release me, because I'm very happy there. Everything worked out for the best."

—Kurt Angle, describing the difficulty of working with his ex-wife, Karen, in TNA, on the *Boomer & Carton* radio show on WFAN in New York



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

"It's really good here. It's a great gig. TNA is a great place to work. Unlike WWE, which is ruled by fear, TNA is ruled by team spirit. Coming here rejuvenated a lot of my passion I had for wrestling. I want the company I work for to succeed."

—Rob Van Dam expressing his happiness with TNA in an interview with PWI Senior Writer Dan Murphy



WRESTLING ANNUAL

TOMMY DREAMER & RAVEN

The Bloodlust Is As Strong As Ever

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

August

COMPILED BY **Dan Murphy**

HEADING INTO THE dog days of summer, Sheamus and Kane were sitting pretty atop the Raw and Smackdown brands, while TNA was on the verge of a hardcore invasion.

Led by "The Innovator Of Violence" Tommy Dreamer, the ECW alumni (eventually dubbed EV2.0) convinced TNA to channel the spirit of extreme, staging a hardcore pay-per-view reunion. While Hardcore Justice promised to be a celebration of the late ECW, the presence of EV2.0 miffed Ric Flair and Fortune.

Sheamus evaded the challenge of Randy Orton by repeatedly getting himself disqualified (including at SummerSlam), while John Cena desperately sought allies to assist in his war against The Nexus.

As pleased as the EV2.0 crew and The Nexus must have been, no one wore a bigger smile than Kane. After handling former World champion Rey Mysterio Jr. with relative ease, Kane finally revealed his master plan to destroy his half-brother, The Undertaker.

And Kane did more than talk the talk ... he also walked the walk. He overpowered the returning Undertaker at both SummerSlam and on *Raw*'s 900th episode.

August of 2010 was marked by gang warfare, unstable allies, and sickening displays of violence and sadism.

DANIEL BRYAN RETURNS, HELPS TEAM WWE WIN AT SUMMERSLAM

Forget about the match; John Cena had his hands full just trying to field a team in time for SummerSlam.

Cena had been chosen to captain Team WWE, an all-star squad selected to compete against the Wade Barrett-captained Nexus team in a seven-on-seven elimination match at SummerSlam. Cena recruited Edge, Chris Jericho, Bret Hart, John Morrison, R-Truth, and The Great Khali as his partners, but the volatile mix of personalities—and some orchestrated attacks by Nexus—wreaked havoc with Team WWE's lineup.

Edge and Jericho quit the team, but eventually returned, though their loyalty was questionable. Nexus attacked Khali, forcing him to be removed from the match and sending Cena scrambling for a replacement. After several dead-ends, The Miz said he would consider taking Khali's place, but that he would not give his official decision until the night of SummerSlam.

Bryan puts a hurting on Heath Slater

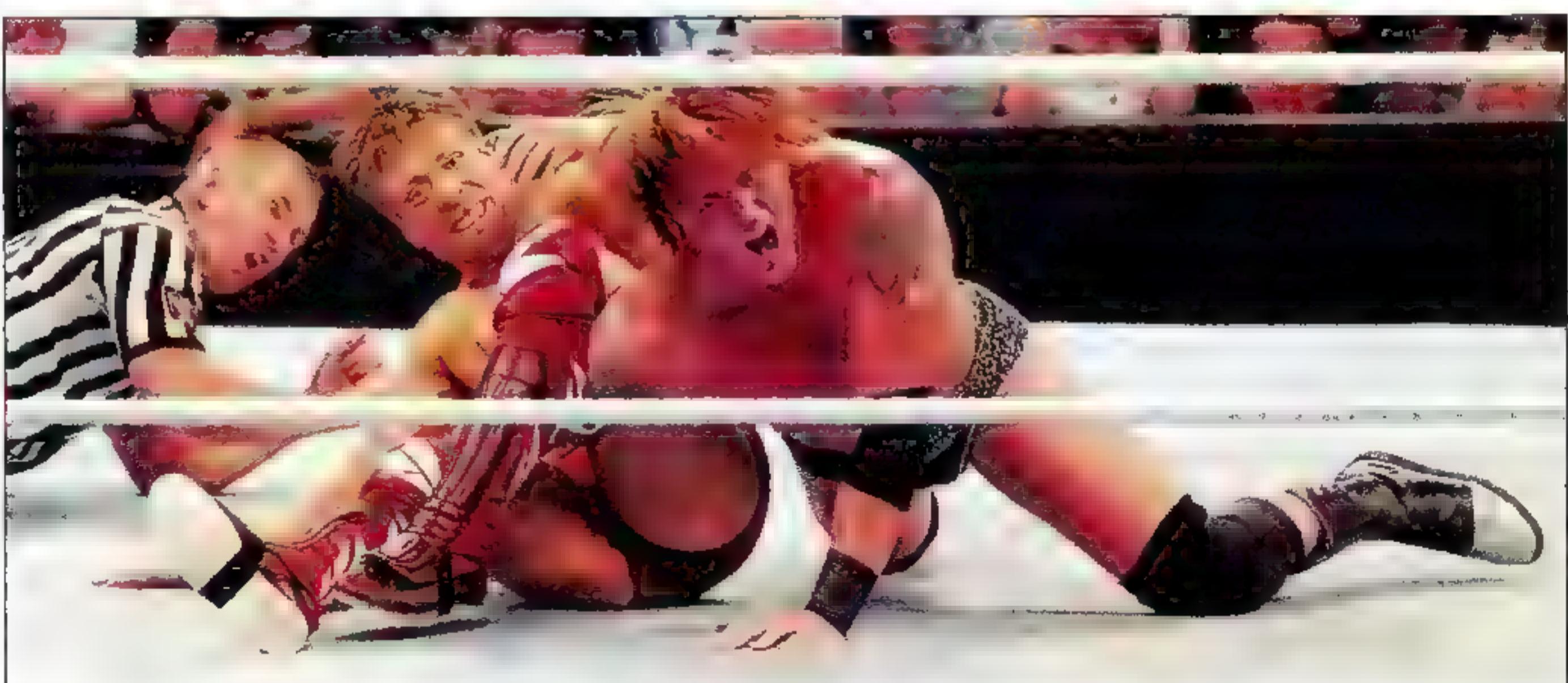


Photo by George Napolitano

VAN DAM AND ABYSS WRESTLED AN INTENSE HARDCORE MATCH THAT SAW THE USE OF A LADDER, THUMBTACKS, BROKEN GLASS, AND BARBED WIRE.

RVD actually got the worse of this



Instead of relying on Miz, Cena made a surprising decision. As Miz walked up the aisle to join Cena's team at SummerSlam, Cena announced he had selected someone else for the spot and introduced Daniel Bryan, Miz' NXT "rookie." A founding member of Nexus, Bryan had been released by WWE for choking ring announcer Justin Roberts with his tie during Nexus' initial attack on Cena in June.

Bryan (who had been competing on the independent circuit) immediately forced Darren Young and Heath Slater to submit before being eliminated by Barrett. Bryan's surprise appearance and intensity gave Team WWE the advantage. In the end, Cena eliminated both Gabriel and Barrett to claim the victory for Team WWE.

DEATHS OF LANCE CADE, LUNA VACHON STUN WRESTLING WORLD

Lance Cade was a big, powerful grappler with worlds of potential. Luna Vachon was one of the most unique and respected women wrestlers of her generation. Both had struggled with drug addiction throughout much of their adult lives, and both were found dead during a two-week span in August.

Trained by Shawn Michaels, Cade debuted in WWE in 2003. A rugged cowboy blessed with a 6'5" frame, Cade established himself as a tag team

specialist, forming successful partnerships with Mark Jindrak and Trevor Murdoch. Cade and Murdoch won the WWE tag team title on three occasions between 2005 and 2007. After splitting with Murdoch, Cade formed an alliance with Chris Jericho and seemed poised for a major push, wrestling a vicious no-disqualification match against his mentor, Michaels, in October 2008.

However, Cade was released by WWE shortly after that match after suffering a drug-induced seizure on an airplane. After a successful tour of Japan, he was re-signed by WWE in September 2009 but was released in April without ever returning to WWE TV. He died on August 13 of apparent heart failure. He was 29.

The daughter of Paul "Butcher" Vachon, Luna started her career as one of Kevin Sullivan's twisted acolytes in Florida. With her partially shaved head, bizarre face paint, and gravelly voice, she stood out from other women wrestlers of the era. She had success as both a wrestler (winning several regional titles) and as a manager, working with Michaels, Bam Bam Bigelow, Gangrel, and others. She retired from wrestling in 2007.

A private woman, Vachon had become somewhat reclusive in recent years. She underwent rehabilitation in 2009 but continued to struggle with addiction. She was found dead on August 27 of an apparent overdose at age 48.

ROB VAN DAM STRIPPED OF TNA WORLD TITLE

Rob Van Dam's championship honeymoon came to a bloody finish on the August 12 edition of *Impact*.

Van Dam was slated to defend the TNA World title in the main event of a stacked edition of *Impact*, squaring off against Abyss in a Stairway to Janice match, with Abyss' spiked wooden plank available as a legal weapon. Eric Bischoff was named the special referee for the bout.

Van Dam and Abyss wrestled an intense hardcore match that saw the use of a ladder, thumbtacks, broken glass, and barbed wire. With Van Dam

JUSTIN GABRIEL vs. EDGE
SummerSlam, August 15, 2010

Photo by George Napolitano



AS THE FORMER RING OF HONOR AND TNA X DIVISION CHAMPION STARTED TO THANK THE FANS FOR VOTING FOR HIM, THE OTHER NXT COMPETITORS ATTACKED HIM, WITH EACH SORE LOSER HITTING HIS SIGNATURE MOVE ON THE FORMER LOW-KI.

reeling after being tossed from the ring, Abyss got his hands on his nail-studded Janice and charged Van Dam in the corner. Van Dam managed the dangerous attack and blasted Abyss with a steel chair. The champion followed up with a Van Dinator, a Van Terminator, and finally a Five-Star Frog Splash to score the pinfall.

That's when things got ugly.

Hulk Hogan congratulated RVD on his win, and his EV2.0 comrades came to the ring to follow suit. The lights went out, and when they came back on, Fortune was attacking EV2.0, and Abyss had attacked Van Dam.

Abyss and Van Dam brawled backstage, where Abyss apparently was able to connect with Janice. A badly bloodied Van Dam was rushed to the hospital, and it was later announced that he had suffered spinal trauma, potential brain damage, and required several stitches.

The injuries would prevent Van Dam from competing and TNA management made the decision to strip him of the World title. A tournament was announced for the vacant title.

KAVAL WINS NXT SEASON TWO

While the cast of the first season of *NXT* was running roughshod over Raw, Season Two boiled down to three finalists jockeying for the coveted WWE contract and title opportunity. On the August 31 season finale, Michael McGillicutty, Kaval, and Alex Riley anxiously awaited the results of the fan and

pro polls that would determine which of them would follow in Wade Barrett's footsteps as a *NXT* winner.

Before the winner was announced, the three finalists squared off in a three-way match. Kaval floored McGillicutty with a kick, but Riley snuck in and scored the pinfall over the third-generation competitor. However, any excitement Riley may have enjoyed in winning that match instantly evaporated when it was announced that he had been eliminated in the polling, leaving only McGillicutty and Kaval.

After both finalists made their closing remarks to one another, Striker finally made the long-awaited decision, announcing that Kaval was the winner of the second season of *NXT*. As the former Ring of Honor and TNA X division champion started to thank the fans for voting for him, the other *NXT* competitors attacked him, with each sore loser hitting his signature move on the former Low-Ki.

At a smallish 5'8" and 174 pounds, the notoriously serious and hard-hitting striker with the booming baritone voice seemed to be an unlikely WWE star, a point *NXT* commentator Michael Cole continuously pointed out. But Kaval's ring poise and unique attacks made him a favorite of fans and pros alike. By the time *NXT* was over, even Team Lay-Cool was aboard the Kaval bandwagon.

RAW CELEBRATES 900th EPISODE

On August 30, WWE celebrated a broadcast milestone with its 900th episode of *Monday Night Raw*. To mark the occasion, WWE aired a super show, featuring talent from *Raw*, *Smackdown*, and *NXT*.

Though the event showcased some of *Raw*'s most memorable moments (including Bobby Heenan and Sean Mooney introducing *Raw*'s debut broadcast in 1993 and Steve Austin giving the McMahons a beer bath), there was more emphasis on WWE's rising stars than on its stars of yesteryear. In fact, no former WWE stars returned for the show, despite a "Stone-Cold" tease, courtesy of CM Punk.

The show opened with a high-flying three-way tag match, pitting Kofi King-

Kaval gets the good news



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WRESTLING

CHRIS JERICHO vs. MICHAEL TARVER

WWE Raw, August 29, 2010

Photo by George Napolitano





Melina and Eve Torres help celebrate 900th Raw

IN ONE OF THE MOST ENTERTAINING SEGMENTS OF THE NIGHT, CM PUNK RAN DOWN RAW FOR ITS SLEAZY PAST, SHOWING CLIPS OF AUSTIN AND D-X. AUSTIN'S MUSIC HIT, BRINGING THE FANS TO THEIR FEET, BUT IT WAS ALL A RUSE BY PUNK.

ston and Michael McGillicutty against one team made up of Daniel Bryan and Kaval and the other of The Miz and Alex Riley. Melina and Eve Torres defeated Team Lay-Cool, while John Morrison and R-Truth fought Cody Rhodes and Drew McIntyre to a no-contest.

An advertised battle of the legends between The Undertaker and Bret Hart never took place, thanks to interference from Nexus and Kane. Jack Swagger defeated Evan Bourne, thanks to distractions from the brash newcomer Alberto Del Rio. In one of the most entertaining segments of the night, CM Punk ran down Raw for its sleazy past, showing clips of Austin and D-X. Austin's music hit, bringing the fans to their feet, but it was all a ruse by Punk. Finally, The Big Show came out and put an end to Punk's tirade, running off The Straight Edge Society.

In the main event, Nexus (Wade Barrett, David Otunga, Justin Gabriel, Michael Tarver, and Heath Slater) defeated John Cena, Randy Orton, Sheamus, Edge, and Chris Jericho in a five-on-five elimination match.

TNA GOES EXTREME WITH HARDCORE JUSTICE

Nearly a decade after the original Extreme Championship Wrestling held its final card, the old hardcore heroes made another big splash on pay-per-view.

After signing ECW original Tommy Dreamer, TNA decided to host a nostalgia-heavy reunion show, featuring some of the stars of the ECW era. The annual Hard Justice PPV was rechristened "Hardcore Justice" and the company's ECW alumni and special guests returned for a night of blood, violence, and fun.

The extreme crew brought a taste of South Philadelphia to Orlando, Florida's Impact Zone. The main event saw TNA World champion RVD defeat former tag team partner Sabu (accompanied by Bill Alfonso) in a wild hardcore match. Team 3-D defeated Axl Rotten and Mahoney (billed as Kahoneys due to trademark issues) in a South Philadelphia streetfight and Raven defeated his arch-enemy Tommy Dreamer in a Final Showdown match officiated by Mick Foley. Other familiar faces included Stevie Richards, The F.B.I., Al Snow, Kid Kash, Rhino, Simon Diamond, P.J. (Justin Credible) Polaco, and 2 Cold Scorpio.

The show proved to be controversial, with critics saying that ECW reunions have been overdone in recent years and that TNA was making a mistake by



Sabu vs. RVD: Like old times

showcasing old-timers instead of its core talent. However, the event drew a reported 20,000 pay-per-view buys, making it TNA's most successful PPV of the year.

While there may not be legs to a full-fledged ECW reunion tour, the hardcore icons proved that fans still love their fix of extreme, and Hardcore Justice helped Dreamer's band of extremists—dubbed EV2.0—become one of TNA's top stables.

KANE REVEALS HE WAS UNDERTAKER'S MYSTERY ASSAILANT

When The Undertaker was found in a "vegetative state" after a locker room beating, his half-brother Kane went hell-bent on a rampage to find the attacker and gain vengeance.

After conducting his own "search" for the attacker, Kane pointed the finger at Rey Mysterio Jr., claiming that the 174-pounder had jumped The Undertaker to protect his World championship. Mysterio adamantly denied the charges and claimed that Kane himself was responsible for Undertaker's injuries.

At SummerSlam, "The Dead Man" appeared inside a casket Kane had placed at ringside and attacked his brother, seemingly confirming Rey's version of the story and outing Kane as 'Taker's assailant. On the August 20 edition of *Smackdown*, Kane came clean and admitted that he had attacked The Undertaker. He also revealed that his attack was part of a "master plan" he had been developing for the past decade, a plan designed to destroy The Undertaker once and for all. Kane claimed that he had been biding his time, waiting for the perfect opportunity. When The Undertaker showed a moment of mercy during his WrestleMania 25 match against Shawn Michaels, Kane interpreted that as a sign of weakness, and he determined that the time was right to act on his plan.

Unlike previous clashes between the Brothers of Destruction, Kane enjoyed a clear upper hand during subsequent clashes with The Undertaker. He laid out Undertaker at SummerSlam and on the August 30 edition of *Raw*, destroy-

Photo by George Napolitano



'Taker is none-to-pleased with his half-bro

ing "The Dead Man" with his own signature moves. Just maybe, Kane had found a way to finally defeat "The Phenom."

TYLER BLACK SIGNS WITH WWE

After losing two of its top stars a year earlier in Bryan (Daniel Bryan) Danielson and Nigel (Desmond Wolfe) McGuinness, Ring of Honor received more bad news, as its reigning champion, 24-year-old Tyler Black, signed with WWE.

Black emerged as one of ROH's top stars when he unsuccessfully challenged then-champion McGuinness at Take No Prisoners 2008. He became a cult favorite and gradually emerged as the top contender to the title, eventually winning the championship in February 2010.

Black, a lanky midwestern standout known for his high-impact offensive style, was frequently compared to CM Punk over the past few years. Just as Punk did five years earlier, Black signed his WWE contract while holding the ROH championship. However, unlike Punk, who nearly hijacked the title belt on his way out, Black left on good business terms with ROH owner Cary Silkin.

Black continued to honor his Ring of Honor commitments through September, but news of his defection to WWE caused many observers to wonder how much longer ROH could survive with its top stars continuing to move on to WWE and TNA. The loss of Black also drew attention to a relatively weak pool of singles talent within ROH, as no one

JUST AS PUNK DID FIVE YEARS EARLIER, BLACK SIGNED HIS WWE CONTRACT WHILE HOLDING THE ROH CHAMPIONSHIP.

**AT THE 5:20
MARK, MELINA
CONNECTED
WITH A
LEGSWEEP
FACEBUSTER TO
SCORE THE
PINFALL AND
WIN HER
SECOND DIVAS
CHAMPIONSHIP.**

Melina: A title belt and a few tears



Photo by George Napolitano

seemed to be in position to succeed Black as champion.

Black's defection hurt the prestige of the ROH title, as the reigning champion was willing to walk away from the title and accept a developmental position in WWE, portraying the ROH title—ostensibly the most prestigious independent championship in the U.S.—to be less valuable than the hope of one day advancing from the Florida Championship Wrestling developmental territory to the big time.

**MELINA WINS WOMEN'S
TITLE**

In December 2009, Melina suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament, forcing her to surrender the WWE Divas championship. Alicia Fox went on to win that championship, while Melina spent her time trying to rehab the injury.

On the August 2 edition of *Raw*, Melina returned to the ring, attacking Fox and demanding a shot at the Divas title. The following week, she scored a non-title win over Fox to earn a title shot at SummerSlam. Melina dominated the match, working over the champion with unique surfboard submission holds and precision kicks. Fox tried to target Melina's knee, but the savvy Diva was able to evade many of Fox's attacks and rally before the champion could inflict any serious damage. At the 5:20 mark, Melina connected with a legsweep facebuster to score the pinfall and win her second Divas championship.

Unfortunately, Melina would have little time to celebrate her comeback and title victory. On the August 30 edition of *Raw*, Melina was challenged by Team Lay-Cool to a title-unification match at *Night of the Champions*. Melina accepted the challenge, on the condition that the match would be contested under lumberjack

rules and that Melina could name the ringside lumberjacks.

Team Lay-Cool may have had the two-on-one advantage, but it appeared as if Melina had outsmarted Michelle McCool and Layla, ensuring that the ring would be surrounded by Lay-Cool's enemies at *Night of the Champions*.

**SUWAMA REGAINS AJPW
TRIPLE CROWN**

Kohei Suwama defeated Minoru Suzuki on August 29 to win the prestigious All Japan Pro Wrestling Triple Crown championship, marking the second time Suwama had held that title in his career. Suwama's win marked the third time the volatile Triple Crown title had changed hands in 2010 and put Suwama in the company of fellow two-time Triple Crown winners Suzuki, Vader, Terry Gordy, and Satoshi Kojima.

The title match turned into a marathon encounter as the 42-year-old Suzuki and the 33-year-old Suwama battled back and forth for nearly 44 minutes until Suwama was able to score the winning pinfall with a crushing backdrop.

Once considered the premier championship in Japan—and in the eyes of some experts, the premier championship in the world—the Triple Crown title has fallen in terms of prominence and prestige. After lackluster reigns by Suzuki and the massive Ryota Hama, the win placed massive pressure on Suwama's shoulders, as fans, the media, and the Japanese wrestling community looked to him to help All Japan reclaim its greatness of yesteryear.

Immediately after the match, accomplished MMA fighter Funaki Masakatsu was named top contender to Suwama's title, ensuring that Suwama's championship reign would not be an easy one.

IN OTHER NEWS ...

The rumor mill ran overtime with the notion that Paul Heyman would be joining the ECW reunion in TNA, but the former ECW owner never arrived in the Impact Zone ... Kurt Angle, Jeff Hardy, Mr. Anderson, and "Pope" D'Angelo Dinero advanced to the semifinals of a tournament to crown a new TNA World

champion ... WWE presented a SummerSlam Axxess fan convention at the Nokia Plaza in Los Angeles in conjunction with the what is widely thought to be the number-two event on the WWE calendar ... Jeff Jarrett and Karen Angle were married in a private ceremony on August 21 ... Veteran wrestler and manager Gen. Skandor Akbar died at the age of 75. Known as a powerhouse as a wrestler, Akbar also had success as a manager in World Class Championship Wrestling, the Mid-South territory, and the Universal Wrestling Federation ... "The Nightmare" Ted Allen

passed away at the age of 54 ... In a somewhat surprising move, WWE released Serena, who had been a featured part of CM Punk's Straight Edge Society ... "Tough" Tony Borne, the father of Matt "Doink the Clown" Bourne, died at the age of 84 ... Angelina Love and Velvet Sky—the original Beautiful People—reunited to feud with Madison Rayne and her mysterious masked biker partner (later revealed to be Tara) ... Frightmare won the 2010 CHIKARA Young Lions Cup tournament, defeating Lince Dorado in the tournament final.

BUSINESS STORY OF THE MONTH: WWE HOLDS FIRST EVENT IN CHINA

WWE expanded its global footprint on August 22, holding the company's first-ever event in China.

Almost 8,000 fans packed the Shanghai Expo World Culture Center to see WWE stars including John Cena, Randy Orton, Sheamus, Rey Mysterio Jr., and The Big Show.

The one-night-only event was held in conjunction with Expo 2010 Shanghai, an international fair designed to showcase different world cultures to Chinese audiences. WWE fans from throughout China traveled to Shanghai for an opportunity to see their favorite wrestlers in person. The event sold out in less than an hour and received positive news coverage in *The Wall Street Journal* and China's *Shanghai Daily*.

WWE programming has aired in China for the past three

years in 10 provinces, reaching a potential audience of 90 million viewers. The company sees China a potentially lucrative market.

"At this stage the preponderant goal has been about introducing the WWE to China," Andrew Whitaker, WWE's executive vice president of international development, told *The Wall Street Journal*.

Though WWE held 74 events overseas in 2009 (including shows in Mexico, Australia, Germany, and England), China remained an untouched marketplace. The enthusiastic reception WWE received in its Chinese debut shows that Chinese fans are hungry to see live WWE events and should open doors for future tours of the world's most populous country.

WRESTLER OF THE MONTH: DANIEL BRYAN

Daniel Bryan started August as the most highly sought-after wrestler on the independent circuit. He ended the month as a WWE superstar and the top contender to the U.S. title.

After being released by WWE in June for his role in the violent Nexus attack on John Cena on *Raw*, Bryan returned to the independent circuit under his former name of Bryan Danielson. He competed in Puerto Rico, EVOLVE, Dragon Gate USA, and a host of other promotions throughout the summer. On August 7, he unsuccessfully challenged Adam Pearce for the NWA heavyweight title.

On August 15, Bryan made his WWE return in spectacular fashion, emerging as the surprise seventh member of the Cena-led Team WWE. Bryan submitted two members of Nexus in that bout to help Team WWE win the

elimination match.

Bryan had created a major buzz, much to the chagrin of announcer Michael Cole, who remained the submission master's most vocal critic. Bryan immediately targeted his former *NXT* Pro, The Miz. After several confrontations, Bryan was named the top contender for the U.S. title and a match was signed for *Night of Champions*.

Bryan's return was one of the highlights of SummerSlam. After two months toiling in indy obscurity, Bryan had made it back to the grand stage of WWE. He had earned the personal endorsement of Cena and put himself in title contention.



Photo by George Napolitano

MATCH OF THE MONTH: RAVEN VS. TOMMY DREAMER

Tommy Dreamer and Raven may have slowed a bit from their hardcore heyday, but when it comes to raw passion, fighting spirit, and intestinal fortitude, the two ECW icons know how to deliver.

The feud between Dreamer and Raven was one of the most intense and memorable of all-time.

According to legend, the roots of the rivalry reach all the way back to childhood, when Raven and Dreamer went to summer camp together. The two were vying for the affections of a young Beulah McGillicutty; Dreamer got the girl and Raven swore revenge.

From 1995 through 2000, Raven and Dreamer waged an on-again, off-again war in the original ECW. Raven managed to win almost every one of those encounters (except a 1997 loser-leaves-town match). They clashed in WWE on several occasions, and when TNA decided to revive the hardcore brand once again, Dreamer versus Raven was a natural match to make. Mick Foley was appointed guest referee.

Before the match began, Raven taunted Beulah and her two daughters at ringside. Once the bell sounded, he downed Dreamer with a low blow. The match quickly spilled to the floor and blood began to spill as they wailed on one another with street signs.

Dreamer took over in the ring, dropkicking a sign into Raven's face in the corner. He then wrapped Raven's face in barbed wire, as Raven screamed in agony. But, just like old times, Raven had people watching his back. Nova and an impostor Blue Meanie made the save and were chased to the back.

Raven handcuffed Dreamer and smashed him with a chair as Foley and Beulah begged for him to stop. Raven attacked Foley, but Beulah connected with a low-blow on Raven, allowing Dreamer (still in handcuffs) to score a near-fall.

Raven grabbed a chair and blasted Dreamer in the knee, then connected with an Evenflow DDT to score the pinfall. Once again, Raven found a way to beat Dreamer. But Dreamer was still standing, and he still had Beulah by his side.



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

ODDBALL STORY OF THE MONTH: CONTROVERSIAL TWEET PUTS HOGAN'S TNA STATUS IN DOUBT

The great thing about the Internet is that it can provide a vast amount of information in real time. The downside to the information superhighway is that rumors and outright lies can often be passed along at the speed of light before facts can be checked. Hulk Hogan learned that lesson, courtesy of Twitter.

Apparently, "The Hulkster" wanted to get on board the Twitter bandwagon and asked his good pal, Bubba the Love Sponge, to help him create an official Twitter account. When a new Twitter account claiming to be that of "the real Hulk Hogan," both Bubba and Eric Bischoff assumed it to be legitimate and encouraged their followers to follow it.

Those followers received a major surprise when Hogan apparently tweeted that he and Bischoff were leaving TNA "on mutual terms."

Word of Hogan's split with TNA spread like wildfire, popping up on hundreds of websites. Only it wasn't true. It turned out the Twitter account was a fake that managed to fool both Bubba and Bischoff, two of Hogan's closest friends and two people who should know better.

Bischoff and TNA President Dixie Carter quickly went into damage control mode, denouncing the Twitter account (which was subsequently deleted) as a fake and that Hogan and Bischoff were still committed to TNA. "We have a contract for two years, and we plan on fulfilling our contract," Bischoff told *SLAM! Wrestling*.

As for who was responsible for the bogus Twitter account, Bischoff offered his own theory. "It is probably a 16-year-old dweeb that doesn't have anything better to do," Bischoff speculated.



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

QUOTES OF THE MONTH

"I knew last Sunday when I saw that shadow of your former self rise up out of that coffin, when I felt your weak grip on my throat, I knew that it was over. All the years of plotting, all the years of planning, all the years of waiting, all the years of watching in the shadows were finally at an end. I had my vengeance, the vengeance that had eluded me for so long. And now, brother, the shadows in which I once labored, they're cast upon you. What was once your Holy Grail is now my World heavyweight championship."

—Kane, gleefully outlining how his master plan came to fruition at SummerSlam, on the August 20 edition of *Smackdown*

"Wrestling is something that will always be part of my life. I mean, I'm going to Trinidad this weekend to wrestle, and I'm going to Puerto Rico the weekend after that. Right now, I'm trying to push music to the forefront and focus on that because that's what I really want to do. I've been wrestling for 11 years, I'm 30 years old, and I love it. I don't think I could ever give that up."

—Mickie James, acknowledging that her new music career does not spell the end of her wrestling career, in an interview with PWI Senior Writer Dan Murphy

"Claudio and I can hang with anybody. Look at our 2010 reign, look at the matches we've had. We can go all the way back to January when we were in Pro Wrestling Noah's Global Tag League and watch how we took it to Kensuke Sasaki and Takeshi Morishima. Claudio took 400-pound Morishima and spun him around like a helicopter. We come back in the States and we have matches with The Young Bucks; we have matches with The Motor City Machine Guns; we have a bloody, bloody brawl with The Briscoe Brothers. I'm 100 percent confident when I say that Claudio and I are the most well-rounded and best overall team tag team in the world right now."

—Chris Hero, making a case for The Kings of Wrestling as 2010's Tag Team of the Year, on *Monday Night Mayhem*

"You are drop-dead gorgeous, almost to the point of being sultry. Why don't you and I go back to the hotel and resolve this like two grown adults?"

—Ric Flair, trying a unique method of conflict resolution on Dixie Carter

"Not only was she a fantastic performer, but I was lucky enough to consider her a dear friend and I will miss her greatly. Luna was an integral part of my

WINNERS AND LOSERS

WINNERS

DANIEL BRYAN: Grassroots campaign forced Vince McMahon to rehire him

KANE: No longer in Undertaker's shadow

EV2.0: Proved that the world is still hungry for hardcore

KAVAL: Overcame the odds and earned a spot in WWE by winning *NXT*

SUWAMA: A new hope for All Japan

LOSERS

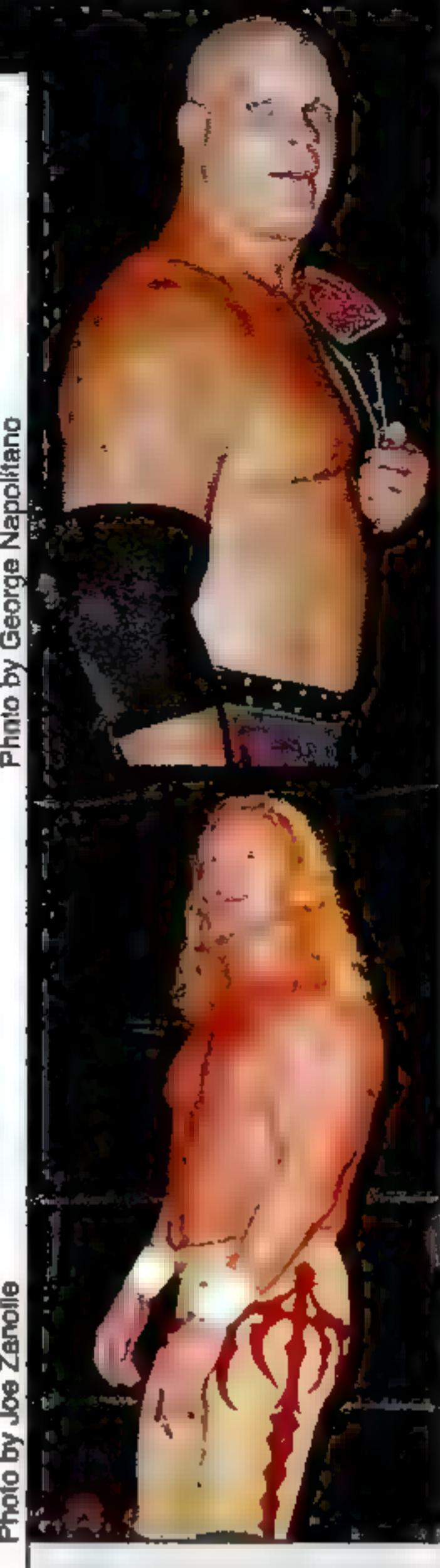
ROB VAN DAM: Beaten, bloodied, and stripped of his title, thanks to Janice and Abyss

ZACH RYDER: Humiliated by Sheamus in five-second loss on *Raw*

JERRY LYNN: Back injury forced him to miss Hardcore Justice clash with RVD

ALICIA FOX: Lost the belt and got skipped over for a rematch

RING OF HONOR: Said farewell to yet another headliner



career and I would not have succeeded without her. We have lost a great performer and an even greater person."

—Kevin Sullivan, commenting on the passing of Luna Vachon, in an open letter published online

"I might have met him once."

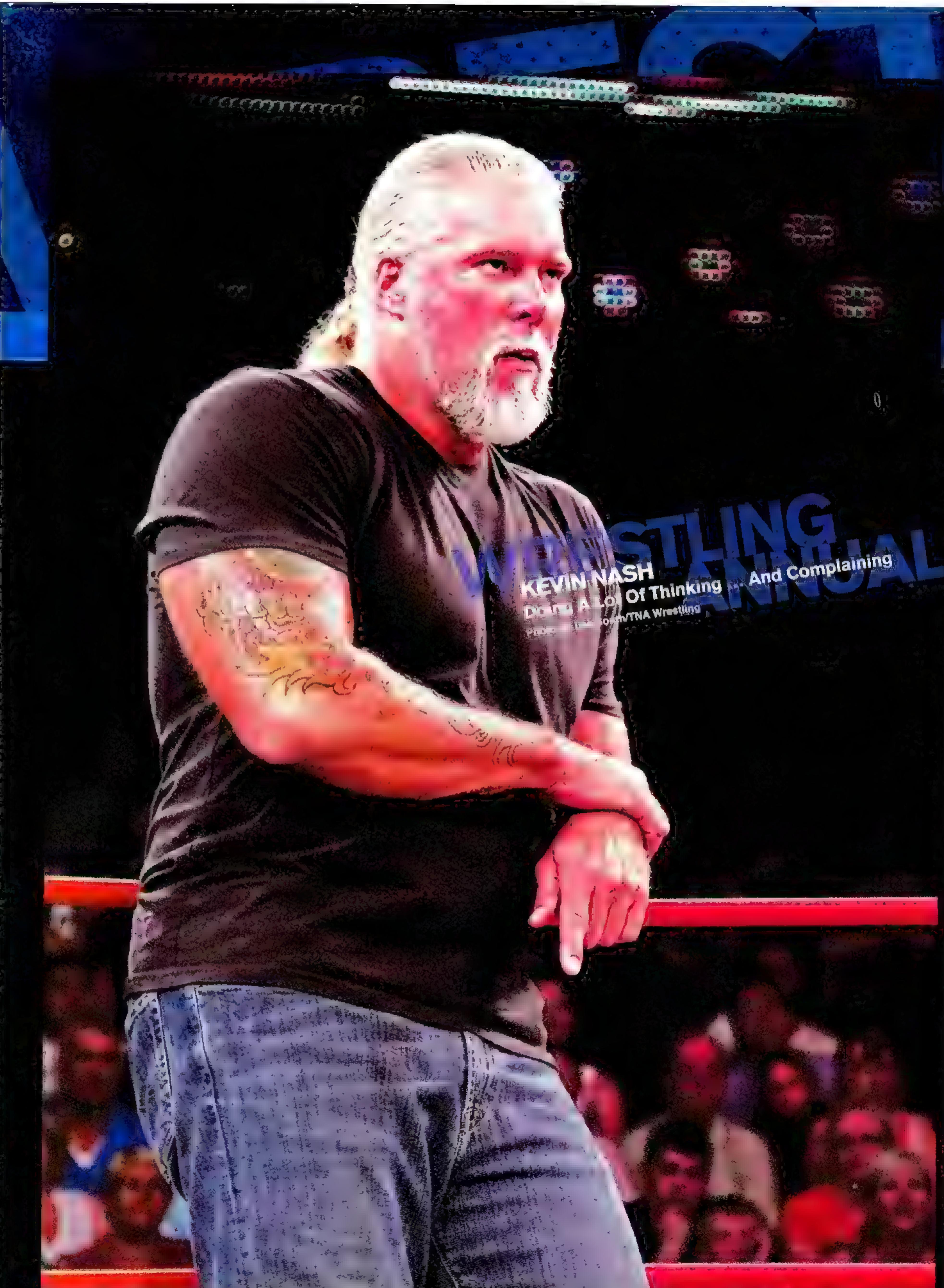
—Senatorial candidate Linda McMahon, asked by the *Connecticut Post* if she knew Lance Cade

"I've been with him on two different WWE functions where she came up to him and knew him by name. She disrespected him. She disrespected my family."

—Harley McNaught, father of Lance Cade, angrily responding to Linda McMahon's comment in *theday.com*

"This is about a celebration, a celebration of the past and a celebration of life. I hope it gives a lot of guys more life out there wrestling, where it shows their faces again. And again, it's just my way of saying thank you to everyone who supported us forever."

—Tommy Dreamer, explaining what he hoped to achieve with Hardcore Justice to SLAM! Wrestling



STLING
ANNUAL

KEVIN NASH

Doing A Lot Of Thinking

And Complaining

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SEPTEMBER

COMPILED BY **Don Stradley**

THERE'S ALWAYS PLENTY to complain about in September. Summer is over, the days get shorter, kids return to school, and most working folks have used up all of their vacation time. But there was as much complaining in the world of wrestling as anywhere else.

Matt Hardy spent most of the month whining on Twitter about his future. Kevin Nash turned to Twitter and complained that TNA wasn't treating him right. The Miz was unhappy that Daniel Bryan existed. Some of WWE's female stars were unhappy about the Women's championship being eliminated, and Aloisia, who was in WWE barely long enough to get a ring name, complained about some people's interpretation of the word "erotic."

Fans seemed unhappy, too. *Raw* ratings dipped considerably during the middle of the month, and droves of fans stayed away from John Cena's latest movie.

Then there was the State of Connecticut, which was unhappy with WWE's labor practices, and Jim Neidhart's family was unhappy about "The Anvil's" bad behavior.

Months like this make one wonder if anyone associated with wrestling is ever happy.

Of course, Paul Bearer was happy to be back in WWE, and Randy Orton began his sixth reign as champion, so it wasn't all frowns this month. And while cameras were not around to capture the moment, we're pretty sure Triple-H was smiling as the finishing touches were put on his new office at WWE headquarters.

RANDY ORTON BECOMES CHAMPION FOR THE SIXTH TIME

Randy Orton defeated John Cena, Chris Jericho, Wade Barrett, Edge, and Sheamus in a Six-Pack Challenge Elimination Match to become WWE champion for the sixth time at *Night of Champions*. It probably wasn't a total surprise to those who pay close attention to Orton. He'd been showing a different side of himself in recent weeks, a somewhat more fan-friendly side. He was still basically the same old "Viper," but the fans had been warming up to him in small increments. He'd become one of those heels you begin to like. His ring entrance was now greeted with cheers, which seemed to increase every week.

The big question, though, was whether the WWE Universe liked him in sufficient numbers. The next night's *Raw* drew a dismal 2.8 rating, and the *Raw* after that a 2.7. Granted, one can't place all the blame on Orton for the

Orton stares down sore-loser Sheamus



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ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY CALLED [LEGENDARY] 'A WELL-MEANING DUD THAT'LL PUT YOU OUT QUICKER THAN A SLEEPERHOLD.'

drop in *Raw*'s ratings. The WWE spin doctors mentioned everything from *Monday Night Football* to kids returning to school. Then again, no one ever worried about those things when Steve Austin was champion.

Still, one had to admire the way Orton dominated the Six-Pack Challenge. He sent Jericho out early, with an RKO after only 90 seconds of action. After Cena eliminated Edge, and Barrett eliminated Cena, Orton took out Barrett and Sheamus, winning the match at 21:28.

LEGENDARY "DUD" PREMIERES

WWE had a lot riding on the release of *Legendary*, the first movie role for John Cena where he wasn't required to be a tough guy a la *The Marine* and *12 Rounds*. Promoted as an inspirational picture that would be entertaining for the whole family, *Legendary* boasted a strong cast, including Hollywood veterans Danny Glover and Patricia Clarkson.

Cena was cast in the role of a former high school wrestling star that has fled his family for a life of trouble, only to be goaded back to coach his frail younger brother in the grappling arts. Cena did his share to promote the film, as well as pump up the new direction taken by WWE Studios, the company's movie

branch that has yet to create a blockbuster hit but is determined to produce more dramatic works. Cena pushed the idea that *Legendary* was a different type of movie that would show that WWE stars can do more than just hit each other with ladders. "When the story is good and you surround yourself with good people, you're going to get a good product," Cena told IGN.

The film was given a limited release, failed to stir interest at the box office, and received mediocre reviews. *The New York Times* called it "schmaltzy," while *Entertainment Weekly* called it "a well-meaning dud that'll put you out quicker than a sleeperhold."

Clarkson received plaudits for her performance, and the *New York Post* said Cena gave "a shaded performance that you wouldn't expect from the star of *12 Rounds*," but most critics were not thrilled by Cena's work. "Cena sucks the life out of every scene he's in," reported the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*. *The Times* pegged Cena as "a monosyllabic muscle-bound lug with the face of a depressed comic book action hero."

MATT HARDY SENT HOME FROM U.K. TOUR

Venting his feelings on Twitter, Hardy addressed rumors that he had been sent home by WWE officials while on a

mini-tour of the U.K. First, he denied that anything had happened, posting a video of himself on-line from his hotel room. Yet, he'd posted some odd messages on his Twitter account the night before, including "Good night, Earth, and remember life is special." WWE officials eventually confirmed that he'd been sent home.

The U.K. incident wasn't the first of its type for Hardy. A week before, he'd been spoken to about his condition prior to a WWE show in New York. He allegedly left the building without tell-

Hardy was bent out of shape

Photo by Duane Long



WRESTLING

ALEX SHELLEY VS. NICK BUCK

TNA No Surrender, September 5, 2010

Photo by Lee Souti/TNA Wrestling



JAMES, A FIVE-TIME CHAMPION, ADDED THAT SHE WAS ALWAYS PROFOUNDLY MOVED BY 'THE NOSTALGIA AND THE LEGACY BUILT OFF THE BACKS OF EVERY WOMAN WHO PAVED THE WAY FOR WOMEN LIKE ME'

Moolah's lineage is now history



ing anyone and never returned for his match. Overweight and sluggish, Hardy hadn't looked good in a while.

Hardy turned the weeks after the U.K. incident into a gaudy public display, using Twitter to tease fans about his future, indulge in a little self-pity, and to keep us guessing. He hinted at joining TNA, where he'd be reunited with his brother, Jeff, and even claimed to be looking for a journalist to help him write a book about his side of the story.

"I appreciate all of the things the WWE has done for me in the past, they have been gracious to me—but now, it's decision time for me. Thx all," he tweeted.

WWE RETIRES THE WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP

In WWE's effort to consolidate its various title belts, the Women's title was retired so the company could focus on the Divas championship. While the company probably looked at the Women's championship as something from a past era, the Diva concept seemed more contemporary. Still, there was disappointment voiced by a pair of past belt wearers.

"The retirement of the Women's championship breaks my heart," Mickie James wrote on Twitter. James, a five-time champion, added that she was always profoundly moved by "the nostalgia and the legacy built off the backs of every woman who paved the way for women like me."

The belt's lineage reaches back to 1956, when it was won by The Fabulous Moolah in a battle royal. Moolah

became one of the biggest stars in the business, wearing the strap until the 1980s. Other women to wear the belt include Wendi Richter, Sable, and Trish Stratus.

"It saddens me to see the historic Women's title moved into retirement, but I am so grateful to have had the honor of holding it," said three-time champion Beth Phoenix on Twitter.

"I am truly honored and forever grateful to be among the women who have graced its presence," wrote James.

Stratus took a more matter-of-fact approach, admitting that she had "mixed feelings," but telling divadirt.com, "First of all, the two belts were just not necessary ... ever. It's kinda like, 'Get one ... let's move forward.'"

LEGENDARY MANAGER PAUL BEARER RETURNS

It had to happen. Kane, for the first time, seemed to be getting the upper hand in his long-running feud with The Undertaker. He was wearing the championship belt that The Undertaker used to wear. He was finishing off opponents with the old Tombstone piledriver, 'Taker's move from years ago. Kane had become WWE's unstoppable badass, just as The Undertaker used to be. So where was 'Taker to turn?

The May 24 *Smackdown* saw The Undertaker's answer revealed. During the show's final moments, a funeral casket was brought to ringside. When it was opened by Kane, up popped none other than Paul Bearer, clutching the ancient urn that is one of the most sinister symbols in WWE history. At the end of the show, after The Undertaker had pummeled Kane, he kneeled before the mystical urn. The arena darkened and lightning seemed to crackle up in the cheap seats, just like old times. Meanwhile, Kane left the ring with a horrified look on his face.

Some wondered if Bearer's significance would be lost on WWE's younger fans. After all, he hadn't been a regular presence on WWE programming since 2004, when he was buried alive at The Great American Bash pay-per-view. But his persona is odd enough that younger fans were probably head-

WRESTLING ANNUAL

DREW McINTYRE vs. MVP

WWE Smackdown, September 24, 2010

Photo by George Napolitano





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Bearer will have to urn his keep

ing to www.wwe.com and old issues of *PWI* to figure out the identity of this strange man in the casket. What they learned was that Bearer has always been the secret cog in the wheel of all Undertaker-Kane feuds.

WRESTLING LOSES MEMORABLE BIG MEN BASTION BOOGER, GIANT GONZALES

The passing of Mike Shaw bought back memories of the early- and mid-1990s, when WWE's grip on sports-entertainment was not as strong as it had been in the '80s. It was during this fallow period that Shaw, a 360-pound veteran from WCW and Calgary's Stampede Wrestling, donned the persona of Bastion Booger, a filthy slob of a villain, and enjoyed a WWF run in 1993 and 1994.

Booger didn't win many matches in the WWF, although one memorable day on *All-American Wrestling* he notched a clean victory over Owen Hart. He also had a brief feud with Bam Bam Bigelow after developing a crush on Bigelow's valet, Luna Vachon. In more recent times, Booger made an appearance at *Raw's* 15th Anniversary show in 2007. This cameo was fitting, since he'd been one of the characters to help bridge the gap between the days of Hulkamania and the late-1990s Attitude Era.

Prior to his days as Booger, Shaw had wrestled using other names and gimmicks, including Norman the Lunatic

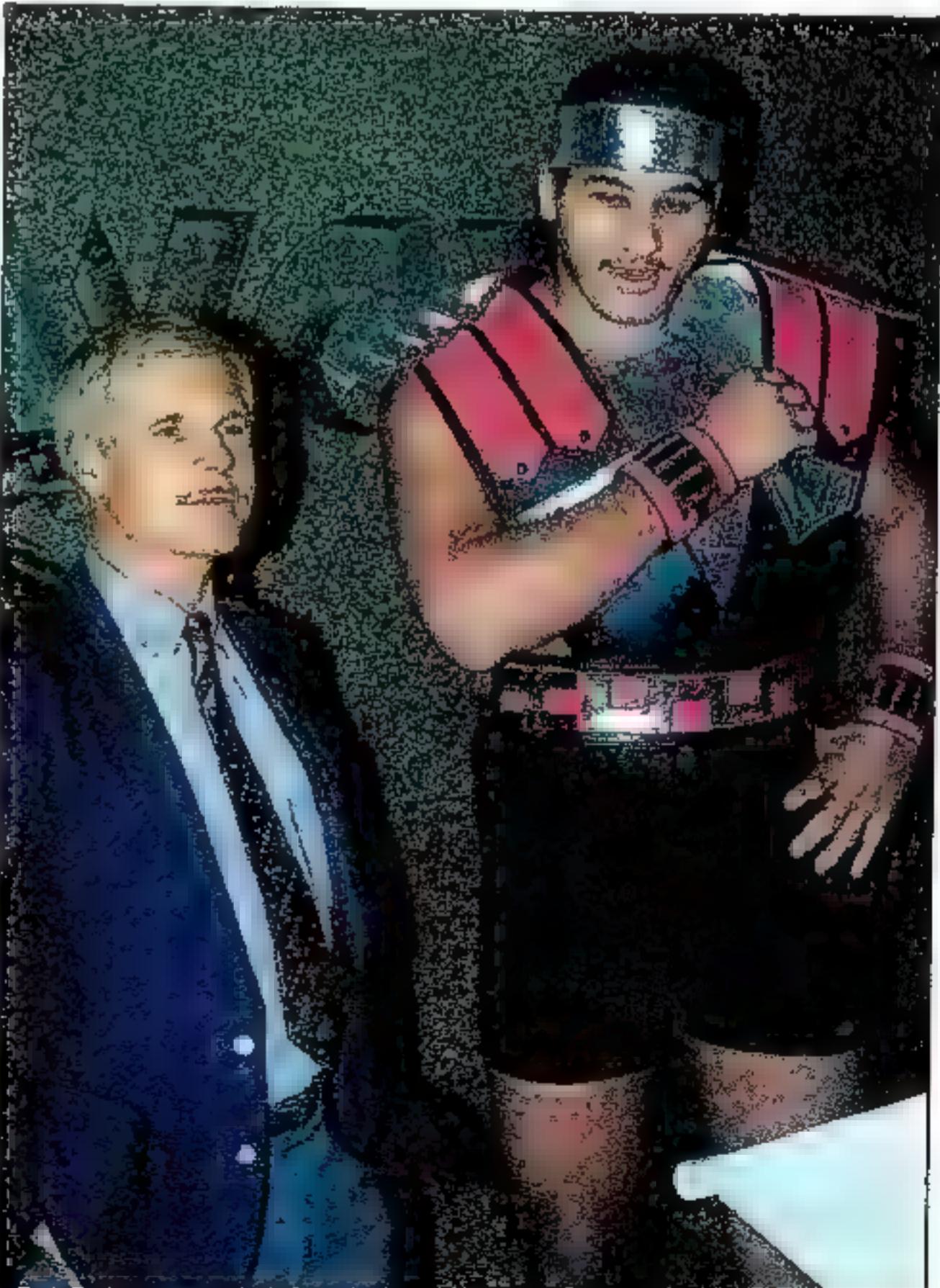
in WCW and Makhan Singh in Calgary. Bret Hart mentioned in his autobiography that his brother Owen had "incredible matches" with Shaw in Calgary, where Shaw had been one of the top heels. As Makhan Singh, Shaw joined Gama and Akam Singh to form a dangerous heel faction called Karachi Vice. Shaw could work Calgary fans into a frenzy as Singh, "the born-again Pakistani." Shaw said in Heath McCoy's *Pain And Passion, The History Of Stampede Wrestling*, "I think taking a white guy and giving him an Indian name just drove people crazy."

Shaw died of a heart attack at age 54.

Jorge Gonzales, a.k.a. Giant Gonzalez, passed away at age 44 from complications brought on by diabetes. He'd been ill for many months and had been confined to a wheelchair.

The 7'7" Gonzales had been a top Argentine basketball player, leading to his being chosen by the Atlanta Hawks in the third round of the 1988 NBA draft. Unable to adapt to American basketball, Gonzales was advised by Hawks' owner Ted Turner to try professional wrestling. Turner also owned WCW at the time, and within a year, Gonzales was entertaining WCW fans as "El Gigante."

In a way, Gonzales was a throwback to another era in that he'd come to



Ted Turner and his Giant signing

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wrestling not to fulfill some long-held interest in the business, but rather was drafted into it because of his sheer size. Making the best of his new career opportunity, Gonzales became a star of sorts in WCW, where he battled Ric Flair for the championship. By 1993 he was known as Giant Gonzales and working in the WWF. Wearing his trademark tan bodysuit (which was padded out with muscles and fur), Gonzales' rivalry with The Undertaker was a long-running moneymaker, beginning at that year's Royal Rumble and lasting until SummerSlam.

With Andre the Giant gone from the scene, the time was right for a new giant. Unfortunately, after a stint in New Japan, Gonzales' own health problems caused his retirement in 1995. When Gonzales' death was announced, Jim Ross blogged that Gonzales was a "kind soul," who "should be remembered as a nice, respectful man who knew his physical limitations but always tried to do his best in the ring."

RANDY ORTON KNOCKS CHRIS JERICHO INTO RETIREMENT

A running punt executed by new champ Randy Orton left Chris Jericho in an unconscious heap at the September 27 Raw. Jericho was taken out of the ring and we soon learned that the 39-year-old veteran would be out of action indefinitely.

Orton's punt came at a time when rumors circulated that Jericho was about to leave the company for a while, either to tour with his band, or to simply get away from the wrestling biz. In typical Jericho fashion, though, he didn't go quietly. First, he walked out of a five-on-five Elimination Match against The Nexus. Then, he lost a match against John Morrison that cost him his spot at Night of Champions' Six-Pack Challenge. He managed to fight his way back on to the pay-per-view by defeating The Hart Dynasty in a two-on-one handicap match in a cage, but his challenge was short-lived—he was the first man eliminated.

Throughout his hectic month, Jericho teased fans on Twitter about his future. He denied that he was leaving the

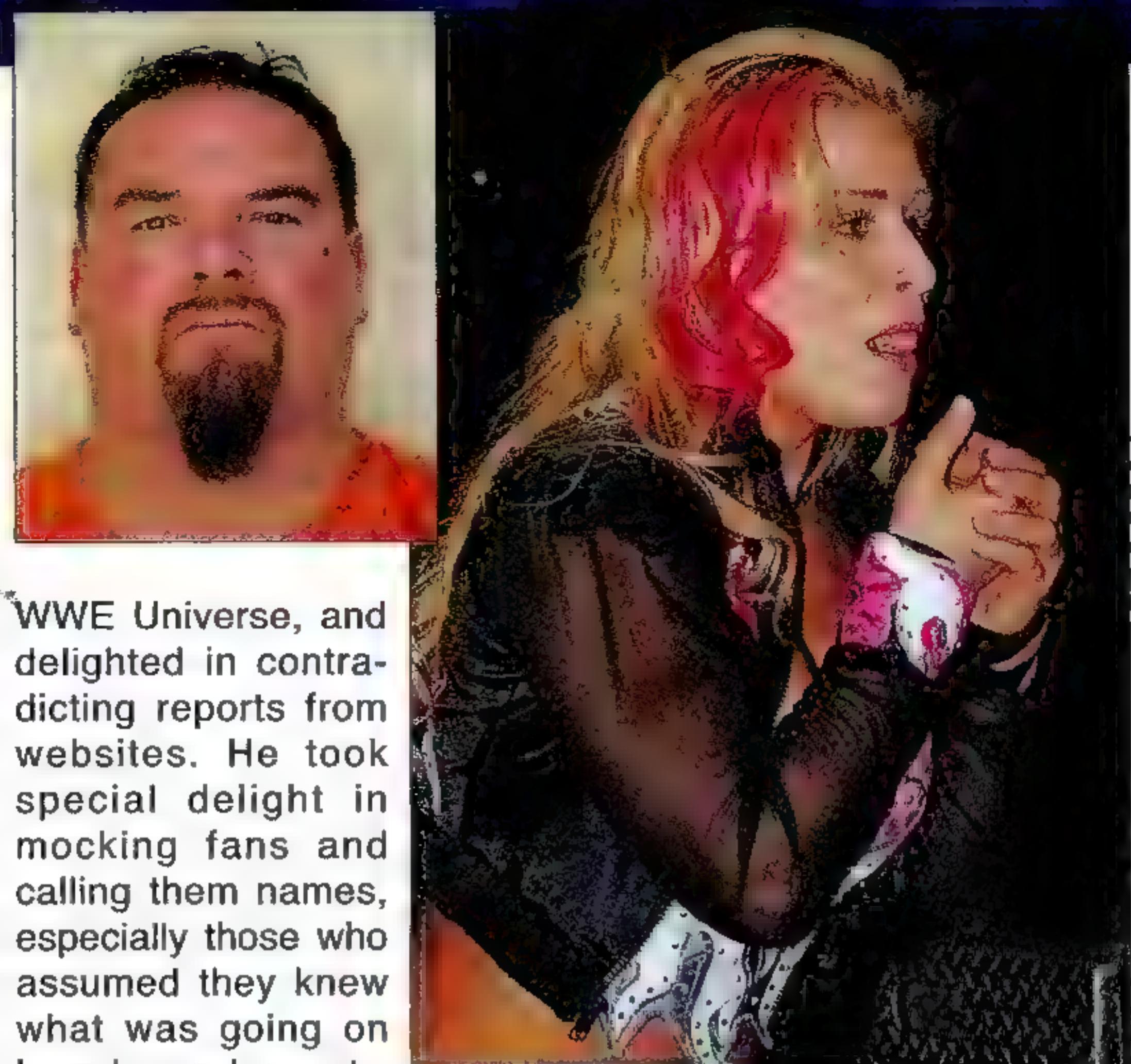


Photo by George Napolitano

WWE Universe, and delighted in contradicting reports from websites. He took special delight in mocking fans and calling them names, especially those who assumed they knew what was going on based on web reports.

Regardless of what Jericho's plans may have been, Orton's violent kick to the head may have helped him make a decision.

Jim Neidhart's arrest (mug shot, inset) has given the Neidhart daughters plenty to be worried about

JIM "THE ANVIL" NEIDHART IS ARRESTED

Tampa Bay authorities found out that 55-year-old Jim Neidhart is still a bad boy. Charged with two counts of possession with intent to distribute drugs, two counts of drug trafficking, one count of burglary of an unoccupied dwelling, and one count of third-degree grand theft, he appeared before a Tampa judge, who set bond at \$138,500.

Neidhart, father of WWE Diva Natalya, allegedly pried open the rear door of a neighbor's home and stole her prescription pills, which were valued at more than \$300. Police had already been alerted to Neidhart being loud and unruly while pumping gas at a local service station on the afternoon of Sunday, September 5. When police tracked him down, he was seen removing pill bottles from the trunk of his silver Pontiac Sunfire, swallowing some, and trying to pick up others that had fallen to the ground. The sheriff's police report described Neidhart as "agitated" and "aggressive."

When the police patted him down, they found large quantities of methadone tablets and oxycotin pills. Several

WHEN POLICE TRACKED [NEIDHART] DOWN, HE WAS SEEN REMOVING PILL BOTTLES FROM THE TRUNK OF HIS SILVER PONTIAC SUNFIRE, SWALLOWING SOME, AND TRYING TO PICK UP OTHERS THAT HAD FALLEN TO THE GROUND.



Are Linda McMahon's enemies out to get WWE?

'UP UNTIL THIS ELECTION, WWE HAS NOT BEEN FINED NOR INVESTIGATED IN THE PAST FOR INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR CLASSIFICATION,' SAID ZIMMERMAN. 'HOWEVER, CURIOUSLY THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT IS CURRENTLY CONDUCTING AN AUDIT OF WWE'S CLASSIFICATION OF INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS.'

local media outlets covered Neidhart's arrest. According to these reports, some of the burglary victims were acquainted with Neidhart. After 12 days in jail, his bail was reduced to \$57,000. He was finally released on September 24.

Known for his cackling laugh and his rugged ring style, Neidhart had a successful WWF career during the 1980s and '90s most notably as a member of The Hart Foundation. He also spent periods in WCW and Japan. In recent years he'd been keeping busy on the Canadian independent circuit, making occasional cameo appearances on *Raw* (2007) and *Impact* (2009). Still sporting his trademark goatee, Neidhart looked red-faced and angry in a mug shot posted on-line. He has had drug problems in the past, and has gone through two stints at the WWE rehabilitation program.

"It's sad because we know our father is not a criminal," said Neidhart's daughter Jenni to the *Calgary Herald*. "He's a sick person who needs help and this is a serious cry for help."

CONNECTICUT INVESTIGATES WWE'S LABOR PRACTICES

The "independent contractor" classification in the contract of every WWE performer came under siege when Connecticut officials decided it was an unfair practice.

In short, the classification meant a wrestler could only work for WWE, but that WWE doesn't consider him or her a full-time employee, and doesn't pay certain benefits regular employees receive. This practice is not unusual for very small businesses, and several state-appointed task forc-

es have been created to audit companies that try to trim employment costs by illegally classifying workers as independent contractors. To see this practiced in a large company like WWE seemed suspicious, although company spokesman Robert Zimmerman immediately told the press, "WWE has always complied with the law."

The classification issue has long been a controversial topic among wrestlers, especially the veterans. In 2008, for instance, Raven, Kanyon, and Mike Sanders filed a lawsuit against WWE because they considered themselves "employees," and claimed their contracts were misleading. The case was thrown out in both federal and district court because, among other reasons, the WWE contracts were found to be quite specific.

Some wondered if the current investigation was simply prompted by opponents of Linda McMahon's Senate run.

"Up until this election, WWE has not been fined nor investigated in the past for independent contractor classification," said Zimmerman. "However, curiously the state of Connecticut is currently conducting an audit of WWE's classification of independent contractors. WWE constantly reviews its internal practices and procedures to comply with ever-changing employee laws."

IN OTHER NEWS ...

Roderick Strong defeated Tyler Black at Glory of Honor IX to become the new ROH heavyweight champion. This was Black's final bout with ROH, as he was off to WWE's Florida Championship Wrestling developmental terri-



Bret is honored at MSG

Photo by George Napolitano

tory before month's end ... Hulk Hogan spent much time in the hospital due to recurring back problems ... Bret Hart was honored during a special ceremony at New York's Madison Square Garden, marking his return to the "World's Most Famous Arena" after a 13-year absence. Bret and The Hart Dynasty proceeded to defeat The Nexus ... WWE announced a new line of Halloween costumes based on The Iron Sheik, The Undertaker, and others ...

Sean Waltman was arrested at Liberty International Airport in Newark, New Jersey, and charged with possession of drugs ... Waltman's former girlfriend and adult film co-star Joanie "Chyna" Laurer was hospitalized after overdosing on Benadryl, although some reports had her suffering from alcohol poisoning ... Cody Rhodes and Drew McIntyre won the WWE tag team championship from The Hart Dynasty at Night of Champions.

BUSINESS STORY OF THE MONTH: TRIPLE-H GETS AN OFFICE

A nation of would-be WWE bookers, know-it-alls, and Triple-H haters bowed their head in sorrow when the word got out that WWE headquarters in Stamford, Connecticut, underwent renovations to make room for Triple-H's new office. Recently promoted to an executive role within the organization, Triple-H was now allegedly serving as WWE Chairman Vince McMahon's "Senior Advisor."

Triple-H had been making suggestions to McMahon for years, but, according to company sources, he was now serving in an official capacity. At 41, with a career's worth of injuries behind him, and recent comments about possibly joining Shawn Michaels in retirement, his new office gig did not come as a complete surprise. Most importantly, he is a McMahon (by marriage at least).

Of course, Triple-H's detractors imagined his influence

would bring dire results to WWE, including another decade of bloated bodybuilders, dwarf jokes, and juvenile humor. His supporters, however, recall that Triple-H was one of WWE's hardest working performers for many years. When he wasn't working his way into the McMahon family and up the company ladder, he was PWI's Wrestler of the Year in 2008, twice topped the "PWI 500," and finished the 2000s by earning PWI's Wrestler of the Decade award. If he can also bring to the job the ambition and work ethic that made him one of the greats of the era, we're in for some interesting times.



Photo by George Napolitano

WRESTLER OF THE MONTH: DOLPH ZIGGLER

His name is Dolph Ziggler and he is September's Wrestler of the Month.

The month got off to an inauspicious start for the Intercontinental champion, who dropped a non-title match to MVP on the September 9 Smackdown. However, Ziggler rebounded nicely by turning back the challenges of Kofi Kingston and Drew McIntyre in a string of three-way and one-on-one matches on the house show circuit in the early part of the month. Ziggler also retained his title in a match vs. Kingston at the Night of Champions pay-per-view on September 19, earning praise for turning in Match of the Year-caliber performances.

Ziggler spent the latter part of the month fighting off the challenge of Matt Hardy on Smackdown cards and on a WWE European tour. Despite such a hectic schedule, Ziggler even had time to help NXT alum Kaitlyn defeat the team of Primo and AJ Lee.

Making Ziggler's performance all the more impressive during September was that he never allowed his "cougar" Vickie Guerrero to distract him from the business of defending his Intercontinental title. Despite her incessant gum-flapping and all the guff she gave Ziggler for his dalliances with Kaitlyn, Dolph remained focused on his goal of forging an impressive title reign.

By the end of the month, even Ziggler's detractors had to admit he was a worthy I-C champion and worthy of a Wrestler of the Month designation.



Photo by George Napolitano

MATCH OF THE MONTH: KURT ANGLE vs. JEFF HARDY

Universal Studios Soundstage 21 in Orlando, Florida, doesn't quite have the same cachet as Madison Square Garden or The Los Angeles Staples Center, but it was the location for the Match of the Month at TNA's No Surrender pay-per-view on September 5. Right about the time Angle hoisted Hardy up onto his shoulders, climbed to the top turnbuckle, and for what seemed like the hundredth time, hurtled backward through space to crash land in the middle of the ring, was when we realized we were seeing something special.

The match, a semifinal of the TNA World championship tournament, had already ended, reaching its 20-minute time limit, but Eric Bischoff ordered it to continue. How Hardy and Angle were able to keep going, after an already grueling 20 minutes of ankle-locks and Swanton bombs, not to mention a surprising amount of brawling, confounded fans.

Angle, who suffered a dislocated rib during the match, had promised to retire from wrestling if he lost, and

he was certainly fighting like a man who didn't intend to host a retirement roast anytime soon. He used his slow, methodical style to batter Hardy, and it was only Hardy's ingenuity that kept him in the match. Halfway through the five-minute "Sudden Death" fall, Angle landed a monstrous Angle slam. It had to be over, the entire arena thought it was over. But Hardy kicked out.

A double-clothesline left both wrestlers down. Angle went for the pin, but the time buzzer blared. The extra fall was over ... and still no verdict! Bischoff again called for the match to continue, and in the ensuing five minutes, Angle missed a shoulderblock and ended up outside the ring, his head busted open. Gamely, Angle tried to continue, but Hardy caught him in a Boston crab. Angle, his head in a pool of blood, reversed the crab

into an anklelock, and Hardy rode it out in agony for the final 30 seconds of the fall until the buzzer sounded again. Still, no verdict.

After Angle's cut was deemed too serious to allow him to continue the match, Bischoff called the bout a no-contest. Some were disappointed in not having a clear-cut winner, but in a way the verdict was fitting. After a match like that, it's tough to call either wrestler a loser.



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

ODDBALL STORY OF THE MONTH: GIANT DIVA ALOISIA IN EROTIC PHOTO SCANDAL

The photos were harmless enough—just a couple of women lounging around, gazing into a camera. There was no nudity, and nothing erotic going on. But one of the ladies was 6'9" Lindsay Hayward, a.k.a. Aloisia, who was being heralded as the next "big thing" on WWE's *NXT* program. Considering that many WWE Divas have appeared in *Playboy*, Aloisia's photos seemed mild. However, the Internet began buzzing when she was promptly removed from the *NXT* Season Three cast. Apparently, the photos were too suggestive for the WWE's current PG-13 mindset, or so the rumors went.

According to Aloisia, the photos had been taken five years earlier when she was an 18-year-old. "I met a photographer who offered me some money to take pictures, and being both stupid and desperate, I consented to doing a photo session," Aloisia wrote on her website. Aloisia believed someone from WWE leaked the pictures out, and

suggested there may have been political reasons for her dismissal. In a blog previous to the photos being posted on-line, she blamed her firing on a dispute with Vickie Guerrero.

"Unfortunately, part of the price of celebrity is the fact that people dig around in your past to try to find ways to exploit you as a means of increasing their own readership."

A day later, on her Twitter account, she defended her photos. "I think people see what they want to see, isn't that the purpose of art?"

The word from WWE was that Aloisia was still under contract, and that she'd simply needed more training before making her WWE debut.

By mid-month, though, with a second series of risqué photos circulating online, as well as a rumor that she'd once worked for an escort service, Aloisia was officially released.

QUOTES OF THE MONTH

"I feel like it's not always a good thing that everybody has the ability to pull the curtain back and see the inner workings of stuff. It sort of takes a lot of the magic away, so as a professional wrestler, I do Twitter, but I try not to talk about the things that go on in the locker rooms. That's not really part of the show. And I feel like if people were to take wrestling at face value, it might be a little more enjoyable to them. But everybody is worried about analyzing and trying to get to the bottom of the secrets. And I feel like sometimes that takes away from the enjoyment of it."

—“Fallen Angel” Christopher Daniels, lamenting the loss of wrestling’s mystique during an interview with Jeffrey Harris at the San Diego Comic-Con



“I can see how somebody who’s been in professional wrestling would think that they’re right at home in the United States Senate—if they were watching some of the behavior that’s been going on.”

—President Barack Obama, on Linda McMahon’s Senate run

“I’m not going to be specific geographically, but the best crowds to wrestle in front of are the WWE live events and the television broadcasts. And the worst are the pay-per-view events. The tickets are more coveted; it’s like superfans going to a baseball game. You really have to knock their socks off. The audience is slightly more jaded than your average WWE live event.”

—John Cena, being interviewed by *The Philadelphia Inquirer*

“I love the websites that say I was arrested 4 drugs, like they don’t know it was just weed.”

—Sean Waltman on Twitter after his arrest

“Imagine if all they did the entire show was promote the Beer Money vs. Motor City Machine Guns match and had Ric Flair, Hulk Hogan, and the ECW guys saying they needed to see that match and said these guys are the future now.”

WINNERS AND LOSERS

WINNERS

RANDY ORTON: Won his sixth world championship

DANIEL BRYAN: Proved he belongs in WWE

KURT ANGLE: Another Match of the Month

TRIPLE-H: You can’t tear your quads sitting behind a desk

FOZZY: With Jericho down, Fozzy may rise again

LOSERS

MATT HARDY: Dumb behavior runs in this family

JOHN CENA: Movie bombed, failed to regain the title

JIM NEIDHART: Hitting bottom means he can only go up

ALOISIA: Maybe we didn’t really need a 6’9” Diva

WHOEVER THOUGHT HE WAS GETTING THAT JOB IN

CREATIVE: Meet Mr. Levesque, your new boss



Instead, you have Hulk Hogan in his 50s thanking ECW guys in their 40s before the ECW guys are beat up by a group led by Ric Flair in his 60s.”

—Paul Heyman, offering his opinions on how TNA’s product should be refocused toward its younger talent, during an interview on *The MMA Hour*



“They bring these guys up from FCW because they’re paying them beans. Some of these guys are getting \$300 or \$400 per week, and that’s before taxes. After taxes, you’re talking about McDonald’s money. And these guys are going out there destroying their bodies. I’m not saying that because I’m bitter, but because it’s a fact.”

—Gregory Helms, on WWE’s treatment of its young talent

WWE'S
LEGENDARY

THE HARRY
HOLMES

COLLECTOR'S
EDITION

124 ▲ PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED ANNUAL ▲

AN OCTOBER

COMPILED BY Al Castle

JUST AS WWE dominates the wrestling headlines around WrestleMania time, October is traditionally TNA's month to shine. And with the sixth annual Bound for Glory delivering several major happenings, 2010 was certainly no exception.

TNA's biggest show of the year was loaded with big news, not the least of which was the revelation of who, exactly, "They" were. After months of hype over the mysterious group's impending arrival, "They" made themselves known in the form of a powerful new faction that included Hulk Hogan, Eric Bischoff, Jeff Jarrett, and Ric Flair's Fortune stable. But the most newsworthy addition was Jeff Hardy, who won the TNA World title at BFG, and shockingly joined the sinister group calling itself "Immortal."

With two pay-per-views of its own in the month of October, WWE had its share of news stories, the most shocking of which was John Cena reluctantly joining Nexus after losing a match to Wade Barrett.

World champion Kane also made big news by defeating his half-brother The Undertaker at back-to-back pay-per-views. But 'Taker may have made the biggest news of all in the sport not for a confrontation he had in a WWE ring, but rather for one he had at a UFC event.

Fans were also talking about Ring of Honor in October—even if only for the wrong reasons. Apparently dealing with budgetary constraints, the company laid off several wrestlers, including one of its biggest stars.

BIG CHANGES FOR TNA ON 10-10-10

For months, TNA President Dixie Carter promised to deliver a bombshell that would alter TNA forever. And at the company's biggest show of the year, Bound for Glory, TNA finally made its big move. But whether or not it lived up to the hype was up for debate.

For weeks, Abyss cryptically spoke of the impending arrival of "They"—an unnamed contingent that promised to change the face of TNA. He said they would arrive on "10-10-10," the date of Bound for Glory.

With only seconds left before the show went off the air, "They" finally made themselves known during the three-way main event pitting Mr. Anderson, Kurt Angle, and Jeff Hardy against each other for the vacant TNA World title.

TNA executive Eric Bischoff came out to the ring with a steel chair, but was interrupted by Hulk Hogan, who came to the ring on crutches, still recuperating from back surgery.

As Hogan and Bischoff appeared to argue, Hardy intervened in the dispute. But it soon

Abyss warned us about "They"



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

**CENA
ELIMINATED
HIMSELF FROM
A BATTLE ROYAL
TO CROWN A
NEW NUMBER-
ONE
CONTENDER TO
THE WWE TITLE
SO THAT
BARRETT
COULD WIN.**

became clear that all three men were on the same page when both Hogan and Bischoff gave Hardy the crutches and he used them to pummel Angle and Anderson. Hardy, Bischoff, and Hogan were soon joined by Abyss and Jeff Jarrett in the ring. After delivering a Twist of Hate to Anderson, Hardy got the pin and became TNA champ.

The following week on *Impact*, Hogan and Bischoff christened their new faction "Immortal," and revealed that the group not only included Jarrett and Abyss, but also all members of Ric Flair's Fortune stable.

As for Hardy, the once-adored competitor declared himself the new "anti-christ" of professional wrestling.

JOHN CENA FORCED TO JOIN THE NEXUS

Wrestling's most popular hero and its most hated stable may seem like strange bedfellows. But the unlikely combination became a reality when John Cena was forced to join The Nexus in October.

Months into their red-hot rivalry, Cena and Nexus leader Wade Barrett agreed on a high-stakes match to be contested at the October 2 Hell in a Cell pay-per-view. If Cena won, The Nexus would disband forever. If Cena lost, he would be forced to join the notorious group.

With The Nexus banned from interfering, much of "CeNation" trusted that the nine-time world champion would be

able to defeat the relative newcomer, Barrett. But they could have never anticipated what would happen. Just as Barrett seemed ready to tap out to Cena's STF submission hold, a fan ran toward the ring, distracting both the referee and Cena. With the ref's attention directed to the intruder, a second fan knocked Cena out with a weapon. Those "fans" turned out to be Husky Harris and Michael McGillicutty, who were later officially made members of The Nexus.

Barrett covered Cena, the ref counted to three, and Cena officially became a member of The Nexus.

Fans in the American Airlines Arena in Dallas, Texas, and throughout the world, were stunned by the turn of events. The situation became worse for Cena when the anonymous Raw general manager decreed the next night that if Cena did not obey Barrett's commands, he would be fired.

So later that night, Cena eliminated himself from a battle royal to crown a new number-one contender to the WWE title so that Barrett could win. He also aided Barrett in beating Randy Orton by disqualification at Breaking Point later in the month.

LINDA McMAHON'S CAMPAIGN ANTICS GET WACKIER

With days to go before Election Day 2010, WWE ratcheted up its support for former CEO Linda McMahon's Senatorial campaign bid, and along the way may have done more harm than good.

WWE's most aggressive pitch to rally fans behind McMahon was its "Stand Up For WWE" marketing campaign. The campaign, intended as a retort to negative news stories about WWE and McMahon, encouraged fans to voice their support for WWE through social network media, letters to reporters, and signs at live events. WWE promoted the crusade with videos on its television programs showing talent demonstrating the virtues of working for the company.

Another thinly veiled attempt to drive wrestling fans to the polls was WWE Fan Appreciation Day, which took place on October 30 in Hartford, Connecticut.

Obey Barrett or be fired

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WRESTLING

ANNUAL

TYSON KIDD vs. JOHN MORRISON

WWE Raw, October 11, 2010

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THE VIDEO CAMERA CAUGHT LESNAR WALKING PAST THE UNDERTAKER ON HIS WAY BACK TO THE DRESSING ROOM, AND SHOOTING WWE'S RESIDENT 'PHENOM' AN INTIMIDATING GLARE. THE UNDERTAKER STARED BACK, AND ASKED LESNAR, 'YOU WANNA DO IT?'

Cena didn't enjoy
Smackdown's Syfy debut

The non-televised show featured a pay-per-view-worthy lineup, including the one-night-only return of McMahon's son-in-law, Triple-H. What's more, all tickets were just \$10.

But WWE may have scored the most publicity in October for a dispute over whether fans should be allowed to wear WWE merchandise to the polls. WWE sued Connecticut's Secretary of State Susan Bysiewicz after she opined that some WWE fans could be turned away if they did not cover up any WWE-branded images on their clothing when they came to vote. Bysiewicz backed off her position.

Still, WWE took its indignation a step further when it promised to hand out free WWE merchandise near Connecticut polling places on Election Day. The state's Department of Justice quickly stepped in and prevented that.

UNDERTAKER-LESNAR SHOWDOWN THE TALK OF TWO SPORTS

Despite headlining both Bragging Rights and Hell in the Cell in October, The Undertaker's most buzzworthy pay-per-view moment in October took place not on a show promoted by WWE, but rather one promoted by UFC.

The Undertaker was a guest at UFC 121, which took place on October 21 in Anaheim, California. The event featured the long-awaited heavyweight title showdown between The Undertaker's former WWE colleague, returning heavyweight champion Brock Lesnar, and interim champion Cain Velasquez.

Immediately after Velasquez' first-round TKO, mmafighting.com's Ariel Helwani interviewed The Undertaker at ringside about his thoughts on the fight and his interest in mixed martial arts.

As the interview was going on, the video camera caught Lesnar walking past The Undertaker on his way back to the dressing room, and shooting WWE's resident "Phenom" an intimidating glare. The Undertaker stared back, and asked Lesnar, "You wanna do it?"

When Helwani asked The Undertaker what the exchange was about, he replied only, "It's personal."

The brief encounter between the two giants captivated fans of both the wrestling ring and the octagon, and immediately began rumors that Lesnar would return to WWE for a match against The Undertaker, presumably at WrestleMania 27.

But the convenient circumstances behind the confrontation also led to speculation that it was orchestrated ahead of time. For his part, UFC President Dana White said he had no knowledge of any arrangement between Lesnar and The Undertaker, and said Lesnar was contractually prohibited from competing in WWE.

SMACKDOWN LEAVES FREE AIRWAVES

Eleven years after WWE's blue brand changed the landscape of the sport, *Smackdown* landed in its new home on cable television in October.

Since 1999, *Smackdown* had aired on free, broadcast television—originally on the now-defunct UPN, later on The CW, and, since 2008, on MyNetwork TV.

WWE announced in April that the show was leaving free television and being moved to Syfy, a cable network within the NBC Universal family, which also includes *Monday Night Raw*'s longtime home, USA.



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WRESTLING ANNUAL

MR ANDERSON

ROB VAN DAM
2010



THE UNDERTAKER SUCCESSFULLY DUMPED KANE INTO THE OPEN GRAVE. THE UNDERTAKER WAS ABOUT TO TOSS BEARER INTO THE GRAVE AS WELL WHEN THE NEXUS AMBUSHED HIM.

After plenty of promotion on *Raw*, *Friday Night Smackdown* finally debuted in its new home on October 1 with a show that featured top-name talent from all of WWE's brands.

The card included such inter-brand matches as The Undertaker vs. CM Punk, Randy Orton vs. Cody Rhodes, and John Cena battling World champion Kane in the main event.

The star-studded lineup, and hype surrounding the debut show, was good enough to garner 2.5 million viewers for *Smackdown*, and give Syfy its most watched Friday evening block of programming in two years. Still, the show's 1.7 overall rating was a far cry from the 2010 average rating of WWE's flagship show, *Raw*. *Smackdown* would struggle to stay near the 2.0 range for the rest of 2010.

Observers attributed the disparity in viewers between the two shows to several factors, including Syfy's weaker penetration of the marketplace and the lack of marquee talent on *Smackdown*, as compared to *Raw*.

KANE DEEATS 'TAKER AT SECOND AND THIRD CONSECUTIVE PPVs

Over his 20-year career in WWE, perhaps never did The Undertaker look more vulnerable than in October, when his little brother, World champion Kane, defeated him in back-to-back pay-per-

view title matches with stipulations suited to "The Dead Man."

The Undertaker had already lost in a no-holds-barred match at September's Night of Champions pay-per-view when the Hell in a Cell rematch was announced for October 1.

This match came days after The Undertaker reunited with longtime manager, and Kane's father, Paul Bearer. Late in the battle, Bearer found himself inside the cell, and appeared ready to help 'Taker. But instead, Bearer blinded him with the light from the mystical urn, and then handed the urn to Kane, who used it to knock out his brother. A choke-slam and three-count followed.

'Taker was given one final pay-per-view title shot against Kane at the October 25 Bragging Rights event—this one a Buried Alive match. The two brawled throughout the arena before The Undertaker successfully dumped Kane into the open grave. The Undertaker was about to toss Bearer into the grave as well when The Nexus ambushed him.

The Undertaker briefly fended-off the group before falling prey to the four-on-one attack. Kane climbed out of the grave and socked 'Taker with the urn, sending him into the open grave. With the help of The Nexus, Kane buried his brother under a pile of dirt, and retained his title.

The Undertaker would not be heard from again for the remainder of 2010.

Undertaker's losing streak has grave consequences



WWE RELEASES MATT HARDY

Not since George Costanza dragged the Yankees' World Series trophy behind his car in the parking lot of Yankees Stadium had somebody seemingly tried harder to get fired from his job than Matt Hardy. In October, the veteran WWE

employee finally got what he wanted.

On October 15, WWE wished Hardy well in his future endeavors, ending a WWE career that began 15 years earlier when Hardy and his younger brother, Jeff, first began appearing on WWE television as enhancement talent.

The firing followed months of bizarre and troubling behavior by Hardy, who had put on noticeable weight in his last year in WWE and was pulled off some WWE shows with no explanation in the summer.

In the weeks that followed, Hardy posted several cryptic videos and messages on his Internet social networking sites. In some of the videos, Hardy appeared sleepy-eyed, slurring, and rambling incoherently. In one video, he even claimed to have split personalities—"Matt" and "Matthew."

Hardy took it a step further when he openly talked about his disinterest in the WWE product, and his desire to get his release.

When Hardy finally did get the axe, he expressed his relief in an online message.

"Thank God! I swear, it was harder for me to get released than it was to get hired! This is absolutely what I want, now I can be me!"

Although WWE's typical no-compete clause would keep Hardy from seeing much competition during the rest of 2010, speculation immediately began about where the former WWE tag team, U.S., and ECW champ would end up. A likely option appeared to be TNA, where Jeff was World champion.

MICKIE JAMES DEBUTS IN TNA

Of all of TNA's big-name talent acquisitions in 2010, one of the biggest came in October, when former WWE Women's champion Mickie James made her debut in the promotion.

Six months after her five-year run in WWE came to an end, James surprised fans in Orlando by showing up at the October 7 edition of *Impact*. She came to ringside following a tag team match that saw Knockouts champ Angelina Love and Velvet Sky beat Tara and Madison Rayne. The same women

Photo by Lee Sout/TNAWrestling



were set to do battle in a four-corners Knockouts championship match three days later at Bound for Glory, and James announced that she would be the special guest referee.

Although the six-time WWE titleholder would not be an active competitor at Bound for Glory, she made it clear to the four participants that she had her "eyes on one thing and one thing only."

"If there's one thing that Mickie James does, it's make history," said James, who vowed in her debut appearance to become the first woman ever to hold every major women's championship in the sport.

Looking mighty fine in her zebra stripes, James called the Bound for Glory match right down the middle. And when Tara rolled up Sky, James counted the pinfall and awarded Tara the Knockouts championship.

But James' involvement didn't end there. After the match, Rayne bickered with her ally, Tara, about the match result, and shoved James when she tried to intervene. Showing off her new "hardcore country" demeanor, James wasn't about to take any guff from a fellow Knockout. She got back on her feet and knocked Rayne on her behind.

EV2.0-FORTUNE, FOLEY-FLAIR FEUDS REACH CLIMAX

Two of TNA's most intense rivalries of 2010 came to a head in October, when Ric Flair's Fortune stable and EV2.0 settled their differences in a pair of wild brawls with high stakes.

On the live "Before The Glory" edi-

Mickie wasn't planning to spend much time in stripes

HARDY POSTED SEVERAL CRYPTIC VIDEOS AND MESSAGES ON HIS INTERNET SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES. IN SOME OF THE VIDEOS, HARDY APPEARED SLEEPY-EYED, SLURRING, AND RAMBLING INCOHERENTLY.

THE PERSONAL BITTERNESS BETWEEN FOLEY AND FLAIR MADE FOR A PARTICULARLY GRUESOME FIGHT THAT INCLUDED THE LIBERAL USE OF BARBED-WIRE, TABLES, AND THUMBTACKS.

Flair and Foley work things out the only way they know how



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

tion of TNA *Impact* on October 7, the leaders of their respective factions, Mick Foley and Ric Flair, competed in a grueling Last Man Standing match.

Although the feud between Fortune and EV2.0 dated back to the summer, when Flair's henchmen attacked the group of former ECW competitors, the rivalry between Foley and Flair went back much further, stemming from some jabs the two icons exchanged in their autobiographies.

The personal bitterness between Foley and Flair made for a particularly gruesome fight that included the liberal use of barbed-wire, tables, and thumbtacks. In the end, Flair could not recover from a belly flop onto the tacks, and Foley was declared the winner.

Three days later, the EV2.0-Fortune blood feud climaxed with a five-on-five Lethal Lockdown cage match at Bound for Glory. Fortune's AJ Styles, Beer Money, Kazarian, and Matt Morgan took on EV2.0's Tommy Dreamer, Sabu, Stevie Richards, Rhyno, and Raven.

The extreme action saw Brian Ken-

drick make a surprise appearance, climbing a ladder on top of the cage and diving onto Kaz as he lay on a table. Dreamer won the crazy match for his team when he gave AJ Styles a Dreamer Driver off the top rope and onto a chair for the pinfall.

AUSTIN ARIES AMONG ROH ROSTER CUTS

Struggling to remain afloat as the third-largest wrestling company in the U.S., Ring of Honor made some painful cuts in October, even releasing a two-time heavyweight champion.

Austin Aries topped the list of wrestlers who vanished from ROH cards in October. Also taken off the road were Necro Butcher, Erick Stevens, and The Dark City Fight Club (Kory Chavis and Jon Davis).

ROH owner Cary Silkin told *PWI* that none of the wrestlers were actually fired, but rather given extended breaks, in large part to freshen up their acts. It was the case that none of the wrestlers on the list had been setting the world on fire at that time. Coming off his second ROH title reign, which lasted from June 2009 to February 2010, Aries was involved in a mid-card feud with Delirious, and later settled into a role as manager of The All Night Express, Kenny King and Rhett Titus.

Butcher and Stevens were mostly featured low on ROH cards as members of Prince Nana's heel stable, The Embassy. And while the Dark City Fight Club were perennial contenders for the ROH tag team title, the duo never collectively captivated fans as much as fellow ROH tandems The Briscoes, The American Wolves, or The Kings of Wrestling.

The cuts also appeared to free up cash to bring some fresh talent into ROH. Around the same time as the departures, ROH introduced new acts including Mike Bennett, Kyle O'Reilly, and Adam Cole.

In one case, ROH fans' loss was Dragon Gate USA fans' gain. Following his release, Aries signed with the company promoted by former ROH booker Gabe Sapolsky, making his debut on DGUSA's October 30 Internet pay-per-view event.



Aries' services were no longer required by ROH

IN OTHER NEWS ...

Claudio Castagnoli won a four-way match to capture the vacant PWG heavyweight title ... Rob Van Dam beat Abyss at Bound for Glory in a Monster's Ball match ... David Otunga and John Cena beat Drew McIntyre and Cody Rhodes for the WWE tag team championship, and lost them the next night to Heath

Slater and Justin Gabriel ... Team Smackdown beat Team Raw in a 7-on-7 Bragging Rights elimination match ... Team 3-D announced they would retire after facing The Motor City Machine Guns in November ... Chris Jericho and WWE could not come to terms on a new contract, potentially marking the end of Jericho's wrestling career ... Lance Cade's cause of death was revealed as an accidental overdose ... Evan Bourne and Christian were both put on the sidelines with injuries ... Mr. Anderson suffered a serious concussion from a Jeff Hardy chair shot ... NXT ended its six-month run on Syfy ... DGUSA champion BXB Hulk beat Shingo in the main event of the Bushido: Code of the Warrior Internet pay-per-view ... Kurt Angle won a TNA \$100,000 battle royal gauntlet ... Former ROH champ Tyler Black debuted in WWE's developmental system, FCW, under the name Seth Rollins ... Kenny Omega and Koti Ibushi won the IWGP junior heavyweight tag team title ... Jushin "Thunder" Liger won Mexico's CMLL Universal heavyweight championship.

**CHRIS JERICHO
AND WWE
COULD NOT
COME TO TERMS
ON A NEW
CONTRACT,
POTENTIALLY
MARKING THE
END OF
JERICHO'S
WRESTLING
CAREER**

BUSINESS STORY OF THE MONTH: TNA HIRES REALITY QUEEN FOR APPEARANCE

From signing top names to going live on Monday nights, TNA made some big business moves in 2010. But it took a reality show starlet to score the company the most publicity it garnered all year.

In October, TNA hired Jenni "J-Woww" Farley of the blockbuster MTV hit *The Jersey Shore* to make an appearance on its television program. The move was aimed at tying in to TNA's newest act, the *Jersey Shore*-inspired duo of Robbie E (longtime Northeast independent star Rob Eckos) and his valet Cookie (female indy wrestler Becky Bayless).

Internet gossip site TMZ was the first to break the story that Farley had been signed to appear on the October 14 edition of *Impact*. The site also reported that Farley was paid \$15,000 for the one-night gig.

Farley came to the ring accompanied by The Beautiful People after Robbie E and Cookie trashed the *Jersey Shore* cast, calling them "fake punks" and "posers" and referring to Farley as "J-Cow."

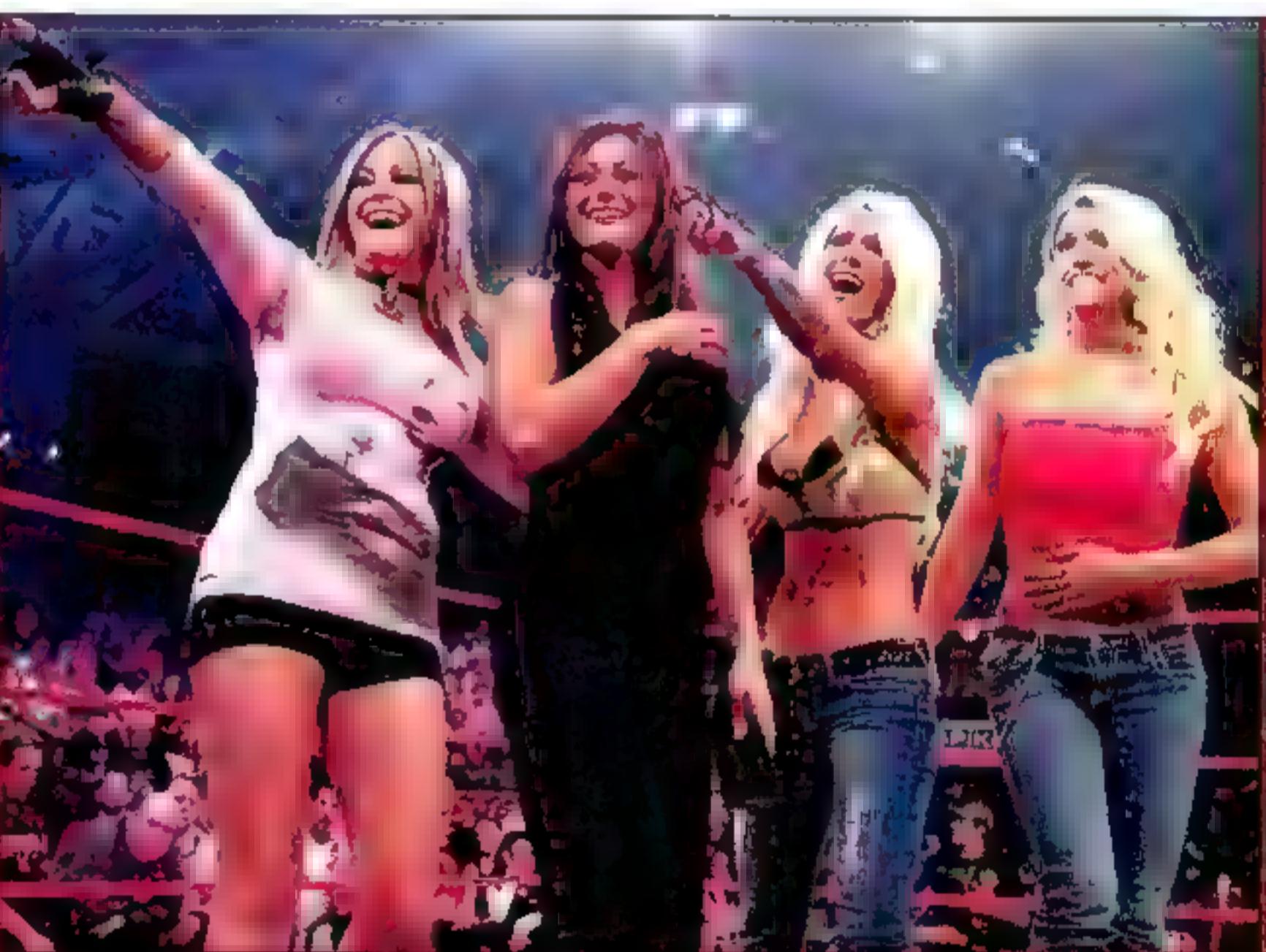


Photo by Lee Sault/TNA Wrestling

Living up to her reputation for having a fiery disposition, Farley quickly removed her earrings when she entered the ring, and was soon pounding Cookie on the mat.

While TNA got even more publicity after the row aired on TV, it was questionable whether the company's investment would pay off. The segment featuring "J-Woww" scored the lowest quarter-hour rating of the two-hour show. One possible problem: Rather than watch her on *Impact*, many of Farley's fans were probably watching *The Jersey Shore*, which aired at the same time.

WRESTLER OF THE MONTH: JEFF HARDY

Jeff Hardy may have lost some fans in October with his shocking turn at Bound for Glory, but in exchange, he gained an elite place in history.

With his win in the three-way main event that included Mr. Anderson and Kurt Angle, Hardy became the second wrestler in history to hold the WWE heavyweight, WWE World, and TNA championships—the only three titles in the sport currently recognized as world championships by PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED. The only other wrestler to achieve that distinction was Angle.

And yet, one would have been hard-pressed to find

many fans looking to congratulate Hardy. The "Charismatic Enigma" quickly went from one of the sport's most popular stars to one of its most reviled by associating himself with Hulk Hogan and Eric Bischoff in their newly created Immortal faction.

In his first appearance in the Impact Zone following his World title victory, Hardy was showered with chants of, "You Sold Out!"

"I didn't sell out. I sold in," Hardy fired back in his first words since turning his back on fans. "Popularity doesn't mean a damn thing to me."



MATCH OF THE MONTH: RANDY ORTON vs. SHEAMUS

In his first pay-per-view title defense after winning the WWE heavyweight title two weeks earlier, Randy Orton was taken to the limit by arch-enemy Sheamus in an epic Hell in a Cell showdown on October 1.

The match was the culmination of a rivalry that began months earlier and included

matches between the two at August's SummerSlam and September's Night of Champions, where Orton pinned Sheamus for the title in a Six-Pack Elimination match.

But, arguably, no match stipulation could be more extreme than Hell in a Cell, and for 23 minutes, the two competitors proved it. The match saw both men clobber each other with steel chairs, ram each other into the chain-link cage walls, and use the ringside steps as a weapon.

At several points throughout the match, each man seemed on the verge of certain victory, but both dug deep to fight on. Orton survived a Brogue kick to the face. Sheamus survived an RKO.

It was a second RKO onto the steel steps, now in the ring, that finally got Orton the well-earned win.

Not known for showing much emotion, "The Viper" appeared overwhelmed by the hard-fought victory. After leaving the ring and working his way to the back, Orton returned to ringside, climbed to the top of the massive steel structure, and celebrated his win by holding his championship belt up high on the roof of the cell.

ODDBALL STORY OF THE MONTH: WWE PLUGS TNA WRESTLER'S BOOK

In October, WWE left several observers scratching their heads by repeatedly plugging Mick Foley's latest wrestling memoir, *Countdown To Lockdown*. Not only was the book not published in conjunction with WWE—unlike his first three books—but it came at a time when Foley was employed by WWE's closest pro wrestling competitor, TNA.

In fact, *Countdown To Lockdown* dealt largely with Foley's career in TNA, climaxing with his TNA World title victory over Sting at TNA's 2009 Lockdown pay-per-view. The book's cover even shows Foley standing in a TNA ring.

Despite the apparent conflict of interest, WWE televi-

sion announcers dropped several mentions of Foley's book in October. And most surprisingly, wwe.com even featured a lengthy interview with Foley discussing his latest literary work and some WWE memories, but never mentioning his current employer.

"From what I understand, it was Vince McMahon's decision to mention the book on *Raw* and it was his decision to offer me the opportunity to talk to wwe.com. It is



Photo by Lee Soutar/TNA Wrestling

literally among the craziest things I've ever heard of," Foley said in the interview. "I think it shows what kind of respect Vince has for me and, deep down, he genuinely likes me and appreciates what I did when I was with the company."

For what it's worth, WWE's seemingly gracious gesture came around the same time that Foley publicly endorsed former WWE CEO Linda McMahon in her bid for a U.S. Senate seat.

QUOTES OF THE MONTH

"My job is to go in there and make that wrestler look as good as I can and leave him a step higher on the pecking order than he was before I got there. And that's what Harley Race did, and that's what Ric Flair did all those years."

— Adam Pearce, discussing the role of the NWA champion in an interview with *The Wrestler/Inside Wrestling*

"My words are biblical. Some are even referring to me as the new antichrist of professional wrestling."

— TNA champion Jeff Hardy, showcasing his new dark side on *Impact*

"I wasn't always good at promos. I think *The Real World* and basically doing all the motivational speeches that I've done to colleges before I was in the WWE really helped me get comfortable with a crowd. And now it's just like second nature."

— The Miz, discussing his gift of gab in an interview with *The Appleton Post-Crescent*

"I think it's a mistake, but they can do what they want to do. The younger wrestlers haven't been in the business long enough to know

WINNERS AND LOSERS

WINNERS

JEFF HARDY: Lost some fans, but gained some gold

KANE: "The Devil's Favorite Son" swept WWE's favorite phenom

REY MYSTERIO JR. & THE BIG SHOW: Earned bragging rights for the blue brand

LAY-COOL: Flawlessly retained Divas gold against Natalya at back-to-back PPVs

ROB VAN DAM: Avenged attack by Abyss in a big F'n way

LOSERS

DIXIE CARTER: Lost TNA control to Immortal, and lost some goodwill with fans

KURT ANGLE: Said he'd quit TNA if he lost, and did just that at BFG

JOHN CENA: Uncomfortable in black and yellow armband

AUSTIN ARIES: What do two ROH heavyweight titles get you? A pink slip

THE UNDERTAKER: "Dead Man" never looked so lifeless

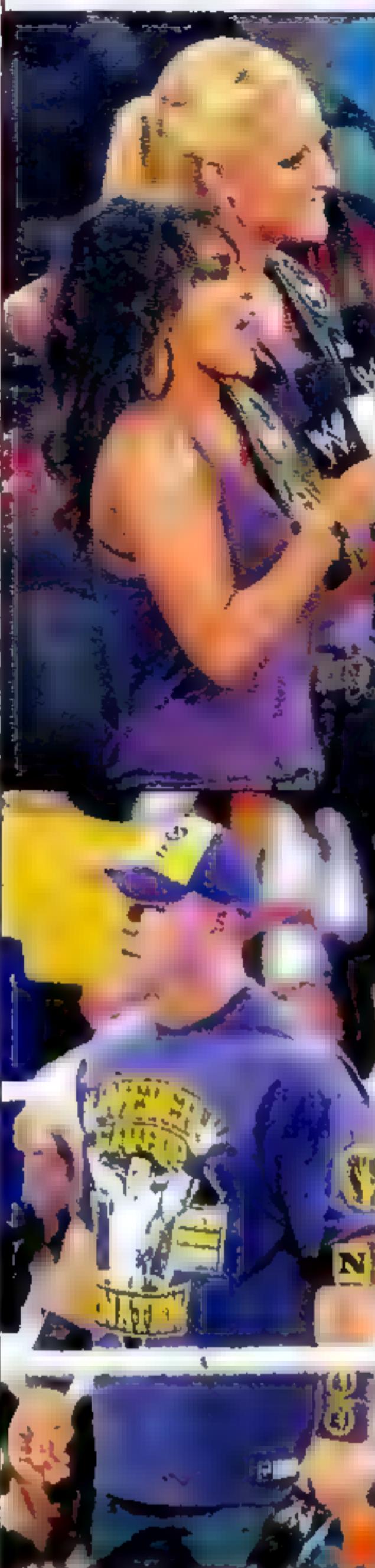


Photo by George Napolitano

Photo by George Napolitano

how to draw money. You're basically going to wait six, seven years to get any return on it and I don't think the business can wait that long."

— Kevin Nash, weighing in on WWE's youth movement on *Ringside Radio*

"The WWE's youth movement is a mistake? Ask Rock, Goldberg, and John Cena if it took them six or seven years before they drew money. Six or seven months maybe. People want to see something new."

— Chris Jericho, rebutting Nash's comments on his Twitter account

"Do you know how hard it is for an eagle to get medical insurance?"

— Jack Swagger, chastising Edge for attacking his mascot, the Swagger Soaring Eagle on *Smackdown*

"Some people will always want to say we're done, but that's okay. Maybe when they're coming to the 20th Anniversary show, then they'll stop."

— ROH owner Cary Silkin responding to naysayers in an interview with *PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED*

Photo by Sarah Pearce



referring to me as the new antichrist of professional wrestling."

— TNA champion Jeff Hardy, showcasing his new dark side on *Impact*



Photo by Stu Saks

REIGNING CHAMP

THE Miz

People Are Beginning To Believe Him

Photo by George Napolitano



NOVEMBER

COMPILED BY Bill Meltzer

BOTH WWE AND TNA held moderately well received pay-per-views in November, as each moved toward wrapping up ongoing feuds and setting the stage for 2011.

In TNA, the seventh installment of *Turning Point* saw Jeff Hardy retain his World championship by defeating Matt Morgan. It took three *Twist of Hate* finishers for Hardy to put Morgan down for the count. In the meantime, the other members of the Immortal faction made their presence felt, with Jeff Jarrett defeating Samoa Joe and Abyss pinning D'Angelo Dinero in a lumberjack match that seemingly favored "The Pope."

Over in WWE, The Nexus moved one step closer toward its inevitable collapse, as group leader Wade Barrett forced John Cena into a lose-lose situation: cheat if necessary to help him win the WWE championship or forfeit his career. At the same time, other Nexus members started to show signs of dissention and hinted at rebellion against Barrett.

The most memorable happenings during the month, however, took place on *Raw*. WWE held an "old school" *Raw* on November 15, which proved to be a hit with the majority of viewers.

Late in the month, the new generation of talent took a step forward with the ascension of The Miz to his first WWE championship. All the while, CM Punk earned rave reviews for his colorful, witty, and sometimes brutally honest color commentary while taking time away from the ring due to a hip injury. Over on *Smackdown*, Kofi Kingston stole the show, engaging in a Match-of-

the-Month-worthy bout with Jack Swagger. Both wrestlers earned kudos for their performance afterward.

On the dollars and cents side of the business, WWE took preliminary steps toward creating a physical Hall of Fame building as a tourist destination. At the same time, TNA continued to distance itself from its past practice of adding to the roster just about anyone who had a previous WWE association.

THE MIZ CASHES IN MONEY IN THE BANK, BECOMES WWE CHAMPION

It wasn't as if WWE fans needed another reason to despise The Miz. But that didn't stop the former reality TV star from giving it to them when he cashed in his Money in the Bank guaranteed world title shot on the November 22 *Raw* in Orlando, pinning a depleted Randy Orton to win his first WWE world championship.

Orton had just successfully defended the title against Wade Barrett in a grueling match that saw the Brit target Orton's knee (see *Match of the Month*). Orton eventually put Barrett away with an RKO, but no sooner had Barrett vacated the ring than Miz and Alex Riley bolted down the ramp

His methods are questionable, but his timing is awesome!



AROUND THE 12-MINUTE MARK, MORRISON ABSORBED ONE TOO MANY KICKS TO THE FACE, AND SHEAMUS COVERED HIM FOR THE PIN AND THE 2010 KING OF THE RING VICTORY.

and demanded the bell be rung.

Miz stalked Orton from ringside looking for an opening that would allow him to enter the ring and strike at Orton's weakened knee. The champion cagily kept Miz at bay, but the challenger would not be put off for long. Miz eventually got to Orton's legs despite the champ's best efforts at defending himself. At first, it seemed as if Orton wasn't as spent as Miz believed. Orton even worked Miz into position for an RKO, but The Miz countered it into a Skull Crushing Finale, and then covered Orton for the pin, to the delight of nobody in the Amway Center but Riley ... and Michael Cole. Speaking of Cole, he often wonders aloud why fans can't acknowledge any redeeming qualities in The Miz. Maybe he'll find the answer by watching a replay of this gutless, cowardly exhibition.

SHEAMUS CROWNED 2010 KING OF THE RING

After three hours of *Raw* from Philadelphia on November 29, Sheamus found himself sitting on the WWE throne with crown and scepter and the promise of a major push in his not-too-distant future.

Such were the wages of the perfect night the "Celtic Warrior" turned in at the annual King of the Ring Tournament.

The first round saw Alberto Del Rio advance over Daniel Bryan, and John Morrison defeat Cody Rhodes, while Ezekiel Jackson and Drew McIntyre fought to a double-countout and

Sheamus dispatched Kofi Kinston in 4:05.

In the semifinals, Morrison narrowly defeated Del Rio after Rey Mysterio Jr. interfered. Sheamus, meanwhile, drew a bye by virtue of the double-countout in the previous round, setting up Morrison vs. Sheamus for the crown in the final.

Sheamus, the fresher man, showed tremendous energy in fighting Morrison, who was wrestling his second consecutive match (and third of the night). Morrison tried valiantly to bounce back from the Irishman's jarring offense, but every bicycle kick, clothesline, and power bomb Sheamus scored left a visible imprint of the "Shaman Of Sexy." Around the 12-minute mark, Morrison absorbed one too many kicks to the face, and Sheamus covered him for the pin and the 2010 King of the Ring victory.

While Sheamus had certainly earned the victory, some wondered if his coronation was in line with the time-honored tradition of using the KOTR to elevate somebody new to the WWE upper tier. Sheamus, they pointed out, had already been a two-time world champion, while Morrison, to that point, hadn't even received a world title shot.

JEFF JARRETT REJOINS TNA ELITE AT THE EXPENSE OF SAMOA JOE

When Jeff Jarrett returned to his longtime rulebreaking ways and joined the Immortal faction along with Hulk Hogan, Eric Bischoff, Jeff Hardy, and Abyss, there was a strong indication

that he was about to resume his former role as one of TNA's focal-point heels. He had no intention of being the Buddy Roberts (Freebirds) or Sean Waltman (NWO) of the group, whose primary function was cannon fodder for the top-ranked enemies of the faction. That much was made clear when Jarrett squared off with Samoa Joe and defeated the former TNA World champion in a mid-card match at *Turning Point*.

Being defeated by Jarrett

White hot in WWE!



WRESTLING

EZEKIEL JACKSON vs. ZACK RYDER

WWE Raw, November 1, 2010

Photo by George Napolitano

ANNUAL





Jarrett escorts Samoa Joe to the mat

was the latest in a series of setbacks for Joe, whose once fearsome image as the nearly indestructible "Samoa Submission Machine" was left in tatters over the past two years. While he is still a big enough name for Jarrett's less-than-clean victory over him to be significant, it is no longer shocking to see Joe come up on the losing end of a major match.

After beating Joe, Jarrett began putting out challenges to the returning Kurt Angle, which signified that Joe would not be getting his shot at revenge any-

Cena gets an earful from promo master Piper



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time soon (unless he interfered on behalf of Angle against Jarrett). Either way, Joe continued his slide from main event to mid-card status while Jarrett firmly re-entrenched himself as one of TNA's lead heels, along with his Immortal compatriots.

"OLD SCHOOL RAW" BIG HIT WITH FANS

Last November, WWE hit a home run with its presentation of *Raw* from Madison Square Garden. The show effectively mixed elements of the past and present. On November 15, 2010, WWE took a similar approach by presenting an "Old School *Raw*" episode. For the second straight year, many viewers felt the episode was one of the highlights of the year.

The show paid homage to WWE's creative peaks of the mid-1980s and even made a few slightly toned-down nods to the Attitude Era. Arguably, the highlight of the show was a special "Piper's Pit" installment in which Roddy Piper verbally jested with Survivor Series main-event participants Randy Orton, Wade Barrett, and John Cena.

Other highlights of the show included a play-by-play appearance by Jim Ross, ring announcing by Howard Finkel (who was confronted by former rival Harvey Whippleman), a surprise "turn" by perennial 1980s fan favorite Tito Santana, who served as the guest ring

announcer for Mexican heel Alberto Del Rio, and George "The Animal" Steele eating the stuffing from a turnbuckle. There was an ring appearance by Sgt. Slaughter, cameo appearances by Dusty Rhodes, Jim Duggan, The Iron Sheik, Nikolai Volkoff, and Slick and even a complimentary reference to Bruno Sammartino by commentator Jerry Lawler.

Temporarily setting aside WWE's current TV-PG standards, *Raw* acknowledged the At-



BARRETT'S DEFEAT AT SURVIVOR SERIES ALSO SHOWED FURTHER EVIDENCE THAT HE WAS LOSING HIS GRIP ON THE REST OF THE GROUP. BY THE END OF THE MONTH, IT WAS CLEAR THAT THE ALLIANCE WAS FRAYED. ALL IT WOULD TAKE TO RIP THEM APART WAS A TRIGGERING EVENT.

Barrett speaks for The Nexus ... but for how much longer?



Photo by George Napolitano

titude Era by having Mark Henry recreate his Sexual Chocolate persona for one night and having elderly Mae Young confront Team Lay-Cool with some decidedly non-family-friendly epithets.

Throughout the broadcast, 1980s-style graphics were used on-screen. The show closed with a nice touch: the "promotional considerations paid for by the following" voiceover by the late Lord Alfred Hayes that was a staple of WWE broadcasts in the 1980s to early-1990s.

NEXUS HEADS INEXORABLY TOWARD BREAKING POINT

With the exception of The Four Horsemen and, to a lesser extent, the NWO, heel alliances rarely prove to have much staying power in pro wrestling. It is almost inevitable that egos and conflicting ambitions get in the way, and the group implodes or simply fades away. This is especially true when the group is comprised of younger wrestlers. Within the past year, for example, the Randy Orton-led Legacy crumbled as underlings Ted DiBiase Jr. and Cody Rhodes sabotaged both their leader and one another.

As November wore on, the same fate appeared inevitable for The Nexus. Almost from the time that the contestants from the first season of *NXT* banded together as a heel alliance devoted to destroying the established stars of

both Raw and Smackdown, a sense of uneasiness within the group seemed to lurk just beneath the surface. While Wade Barrett ruled the group with an iron fist and stressed the importance of working together at all costs, his own focus shifted to a purely individual concern: winning the WWE championship. Meanwhile, the rest of the group, most notably David Otunga, began to become visibly perturbed about carrying out Barrett's orders. By November, members of the group had begun acting on their own, staging attacks and run-ins that Barrett had not approved. They also showed increasing reluctance to rush to Barrett's aid when he was in trouble. Group members increasingly bickered with one another and displayed varying degrees of desire for independence.

Apart from the implications for Cena's career, Barrett's defeat at Survivor Series also showed further evidence that he was losing his grip on the rest of the group. By the end of the month, it was clear that the alliance was frayed. All it would take to rip them apart was a triggering event.

UNDERTAKER SUFFERS A SETBACK

Over the past few years, The Undertaker's career has paralleled those of former hockey greats Mario Lemieux and Peter Forsberg to a degree. Like the two NHL Hall of Famers, Undertaker has been unable to work a "full season" late in his tenure due to unrelenting injuries and the cumulative wear-and-tear of a long career.

WWE has come to accept the fact that its aging superstar will frequently be on the shelf with injuries, and the main focus is on

having him available for the biggest events of the year. Naturally for WWE, that's WrestleMania, where The Undertaker annually defends his unbeaten streak at the company's biggest showcase.

The Undertaker's latest surgery (this time on his shoulder to repair a torn rotator cuff) forced him to delay his return to the ring and put on hold the latest installment of his feud with Kane. In November, it was learned that a doctor diagnosed ongoing laxity in 'Taker's shoulder, which delayed the start of a scheduled physical rehabilitation program by several weeks.

WWE continued to hold out hope that Undertaker would be able to compete at WrestleMania 27, but the latest setback dashed hopes that he would be able to be physically involved in storylines building up to the big event, especially ones at the Royal Rumble (which annually marks the start of angles that carry into WrestleMania) and ensuing *Raw* and *Smackdown* broadcasts.

TRIPLE-H DELAYS FULL-SCALE RETURN

The impact of The Undertaker's absence from WWE was exacerbated by the injury problems of another one of its veteran superstars: Triple-H.

Recovering slowly from biceps surgery, "The Game" announced in November that he was likely to be out the rest of the calendar year.

Triple H-made a return to the ring in late-October, wrestling Alberto Del Rio at WWE's Fan Appreciation event. By his own admission, Triple-H (who was clad in a T-shirt and pants rather than his customary black tights) wrestled a tentative match against the Mexican star. He avoided powerslams and other maneuvers that tax the upper body, and used his good arm to throw punches and chops. Afterward, he told federation officials he did not feel like he was anywhere close to being ready for a full-fledged return to the ring.

As with Undertaker, Triple-H and WWE's ultimate concern was to be sure that he was ready for WrestleMania. Unlike Undertaker, Triple-H expressed

optimism that he'd be able to at least participate in some of the build-up events for 'Mania. But he also acknowledged the need for caution with his current injury. Over the years, Triple-H has been susceptible to both biceps and triceps tears.

KEVIN NASH COURTS WWE WHILE DISCUSSING NEW CONTRACT WITH TNA

Kevin Nash has never been shy about expressing his opinions on anything and everything in the business. As his contract with TNA neared an end, Nash posted several scathing online commentaries about the company and its direction.

In November, Nash created a stir by publicly asking WWE on Twitter if he could have a spot in the next Royal Rumble. The former WWF World champion even offered to join Vince McMahon's currently dormant "Kiss My Ass" club if he failed to win (or at least put in a strong performance) in the main event of the pay-per-view show. In return, if he held up his end of the bargain, Nash wanted to be the one to oppose The Undertaker as the "Dead Man" attempted to protect his perfect record at WrestleMania.

WWE had no public response to Nash's offer. Meanwhile, reports also surfaced that Nash and TNA had reopened talks about him rejoining the company and were close to an agreement. Late in the month, both sides denied the report of a contract extension, but rumors persisted that an agreement was imminent.

In the meantime, Nash managed to consistently keep his name in the news while healing his often-injured body and taking time off from the ring.

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Triple-H's one-night-only comeback proved his recovery period was not over

TRIPLE-H EXPRESSED OPTIMISM THAT HE'D BE ABLE TO AT LEAST PARTICIPATE IN SOME OF THE BUILD-UP EVENTS FOR 'MANIA. BUT HE ALSO ACKNOWLEDGED THE NEED FOR CAUTION WITH HIS CURRENT INJURY.



Photo by George Napolitano

Khali has heat in native India

OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS, NINE OF MEXICO'S 31 STATES HAVE EXPERIENCED EPIDEMIC LEVELS OF INDISCRIMINATE VIOLENT CRIMES—including KIDNAPPINGS, ARMED ROBBERIES, AND MURDERS. THE LUCHA LIBRE WORLD HAS NOT BEEN IMMUNE.

GREAT KHALI DRAWS HEAVY CRITICISM IN INDIA

The Great Khali has become a regular tabloid figure and dartboard for media critics in his native India. In November, his media detractors had a field day reporting two stories that cast him in a negative light.

First, it was learned that Khali faces a lawsuit for allegedly breaching a contractual obligation to promote a new Bollywood film, *Ramaa: The Saviour*, while he was participating in an Indian reality TV program called *The Big Boss*. The movie's producer claims that Khali was paid up-front all monies for starring in and promoting the movie but said that the wrestler skipped out on his promotional duties in order to maximize his take from his television appearances.

Khali, who reportedly also drew a signing bonus and weekly salary 10 times higher than the other cast members on the show, was deemed greedy and egotistical by large segments of the Indian media. Also, the former policeman prolonged his contracted stay on the show by several weeks from the originally planned 10- to 12-day stint.

It should be noted, however, that while he has taken a beating in the mainstream and tabloid media in India, Khali generally remains a popular public figure in his home country. His television appearances, both with WWE and on non-wrestling programs, typically pull in strong ratings.

MEXICAN PROMOTIONS PUT HEADS TOGETHER ON SAFETY MEASURES

Generally speaking, relations between arch-rival lucha libre promotions CMLL and AAA are about as friendly and cooperative as those between WWE and its top rival, TNA. But throughout the fall, CMLL and AAA officials got together behind the scenes to discuss a matter that transcends a business rivalry—keeping their wrestlers safe when traveling through and holding

shows in certain parts of Mexico.

Over the past two years, nine of Mexico's 31 states have experienced epidemic levels of indiscriminate violent crimes—including kidnappings, armed robberies, and murders. The lucha libre world has not been immune, and several shows have been interrupted or delayed because of inadequate security or reports of potential gun violence.

Several major musical acts have simply canceled scheduled shows in Mexico over the past year due to similar concerns. That is not an option for the wrestling promotions, of course. Therefore, CMLL and AAA got together to discuss strategies for maximizing security both for fans and performers.

AAA superstar Dr. Wagner Jr. explained, "There is no need for panic. But we all have to be alert and smart about keeping ourselves as safe as possible. We travel in numbers, avoid wandering off to unfamiliar areas, stay out of known trouble spots, and things of that nature. If there isn't adequate arena security available for the performers and the fans, the show shouldn't be held. A wrestling show isn't worth dying over. But otherwise, it's business as usual."

IN OTHER NEWS ...

Natalya won the WWE Divas championship at the Survivor Series in a 2-on-1 handicap match against Team Lay-Cool ... Eric Bischoff's son, Garrett, gained exposure on *Impact* as referee Jackson James, without his identity being acknowledged on the air, on TNA's official website, or even backstage ... Rey Mysterio Jr. was forced to take a brief hiatus from the road after sustaining an inner-ear infection that affected his equilibrium. Under doctor's orders to avoid air travel, the masked star had to cancel several weeks of scheduled appearances ... The international wrestling community mourned the November deaths of long-time All Japan front office official, referee, and liaison, Kanji "Joe" Higuchi; Canadian born 1950s European circuit star Jack Laskin; New Japan hall-of-famer Kantaro Hoshino, and former lucha libre mid-carder El Hijo de Cien Caras ... WWE purged numerous developmental wrestlers from its Florida

Championship Wrestling roster. Among those cut were Dr. Cable Jones, Devin Allen, Fahd Rakman, Ron Myers, and Rhys Ali ... Steve Austin announced plans to feature former UFC star Keith Jardine in his new movie, *Hangar 14* ... At the recommendation of wrestlers in both TNA and WWE, indie wrestler

Teddy Stigma managed to appear on both *Raw* and *Impact* in the same month. The wrestler, who was trained by Team 3-D, appeared as a security guard in a *Raw* segment with Layla and Michelle McCool. One week earlier, he was in the ring as an extra during Jeff Jarrett's MMA-style exhibition.

BUSINESS STORY OF THE MONTH: WWE SEEKS MUNICIPAL BIDS FOR OFFICIAL HALL OF FAME BUILDING

For several years, Vince McMahon has been exploring the idea of building a physical Hall of Fame and Museum with the WWE seal of approval. Not only would there be a room to honor the current and future inductees in the WWE Hall, there would also be a building to house federation memorabilia and recount the company's evolution from a regional pro wrestling promotion to an international sports-entertainment titan.

The company sent out requests for proposals to municipalities around the country, focusing on locations with an already well-established tourism industry. In a solicitation letter sent to selected cities, WWE officials noted that the federation "is seeking public and/or private partners (may include local and state governmental entities, private-sector funding sources, etc.) to develop, fund, and maintain

what will be viewed as one of the premier halls of fame in the world of sports and entertainment."

In November, reports surfaced that Orlando, Florida, had emerged as the early favorite to land the WWE Hall of Fame project. An article in the *Orlando Sentinel* noted that city officials prepared a bid to submit to WWE. The degree of public assistance, private company sponsorship, and WWE financial commitment in the proposal was not yet known.

Orlando seems to be an ideal locale for the project, because the city—which is already home to Disney World and Universal Studios among other internationally famous tourist destinations—meets all the criteria WWE is reportedly seeking for the host site.

WWE officials declined to comment on the status of the Orlando bid or the timetable for completing the project.

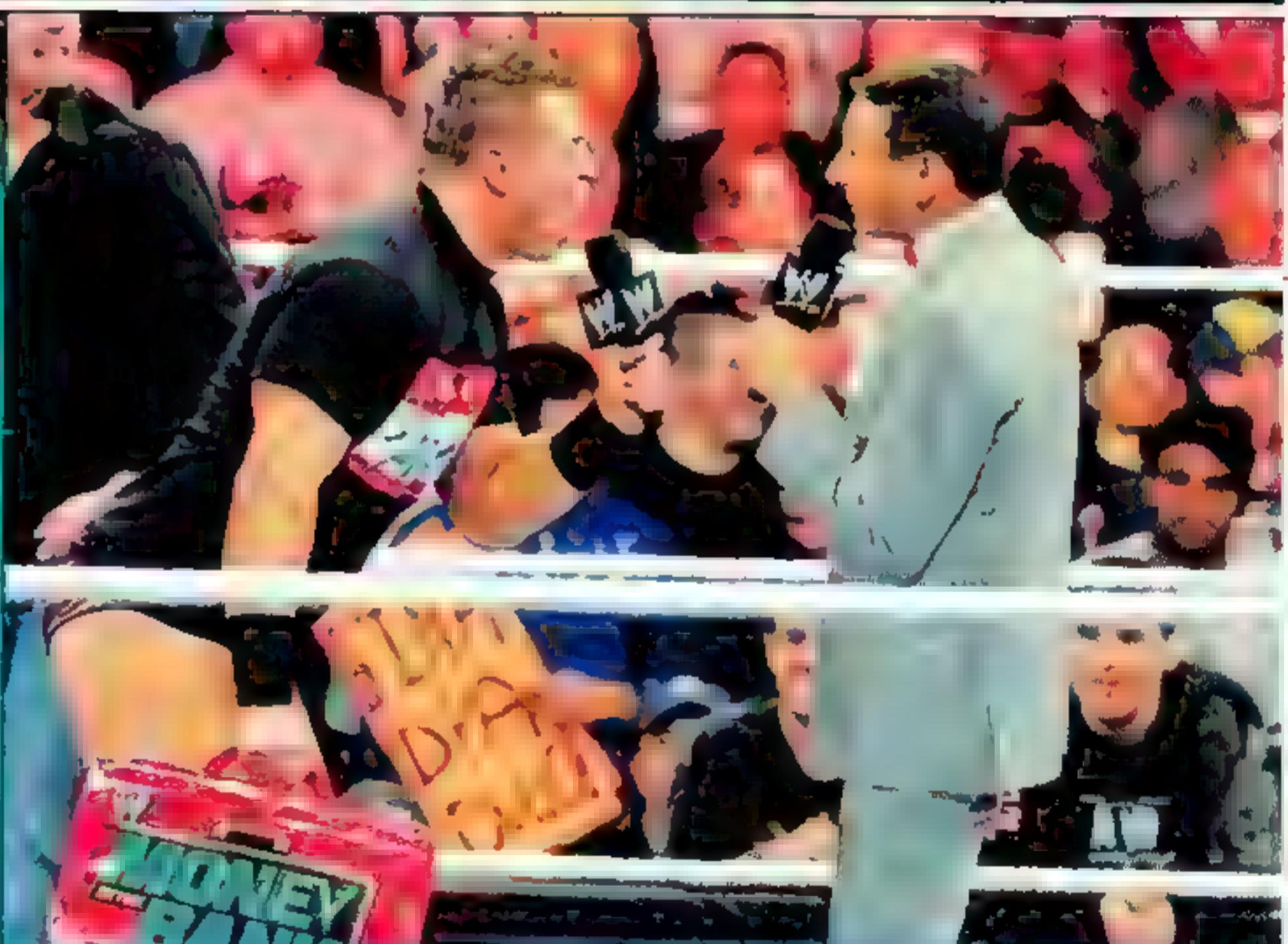
WRESTLER OF THE MONTH: THE MIZ

He struggled at first to be taken seriously and then seemed locked into mid-card status but The Miz silenced many critics by capturing the WWE championship on the November 22 edition of *Raw*.

For some, the fact that Miz captured the title by opportunistically cashing in his Money in the Bank briefcase immediately after Randy Orton won a grueling title defense against Wade Barrett did not detract from the accomplishment. After all, both Edge and CM Punk had won WWE world titles by identical means, and the victories elevated their careers significantly at the time.

By virtue of winning the *Raw* roster's Money in the Bank ladder match at the WWE's July pay-per-view event, and a world title four months later, The Miz has shown that he's more than just a former reality TV show personality with a somewhat irritating catch phrase ("I'm the Miz, and I am awesome!").

Is the 30-year-old Miz ready for headliner status? That remains to be seen. But his successful early title defenses in November and December showed that he doesn't intend to fade quickly from the title picture. Quite frankly, he came off looking better than Jack



Swagger did earlier in the year.

The Miz may not be above bending the rules or accepting outside help, and he's certainly not afraid to lay the self-aggrandizing hyperbole on thick. But that's what good heels are made of, and he always draws a reaction from the crowd. Those who regarded The Miz as a gnat-like mid-carder were forced to reconsider their position the second he strapped on one of WWE's two world title belts.

MATCH OF THE MONTH: RANDY ORTON vs. WADE BARRETT

While the main event of the Survivor Series may not have been a major candidate for Match of the Year, it had plenty of intrigue and strong performances both by defending WWE champion Randy Orton (who would lose the title one night later on *Raw*) and challenger Wade Barrett. The intrigue lay in how special referee John Cena would go about officiating the match.

Per match stipulations, Cena was forced to put his WWE contract on the line based on the outcome of the match. If Nexus leader Barrett won the title, Cena would be allowed to continue his career. If Orton won, Cena would be fired from WWE. Would the virtuous Cena put his sense of fair play first or would he ultimately have to consider what was in his own best interests?

The gripping bout saw numerous momentum swings along the way. To the ever-growing frustration of Barrett, Cena called the match impartially throughout. Finally, an

enraged Barrett got in Cena's face and argued with his ostensible ally. As Barrett turned around, the opportunistic Orton nailed Barrett with an RKO.

The moment of truth had arrived. Cena slapped the mat once and then twice. He hesitated briefly and then completed the three-count, giving Orton his deserved victory while forfeiting his own career.

Few, if any, fans expected Cena to be gone from WWE for very long. But there was no denying the sheer drama of seeing Cena mentally grapple with his priorities, and decide that his integrity was ultimately what was most important to him.



Photo by George Napolitano

ODDBALL STORY OF THE MONTH: HARDYS FEATURED IN BIZARRE VIDEO CRITICIZING CM PUNK, WWE

Jeff and Matt Hardy are no strangers to using the Internet for telling their side of the many controversies they've been embroiled in over the years. Within the past year, Matt Hardy all but secured his eventual release from WWE by posting several videos that were highly critical of his soon-to-be ex-employer.

Even by Hardy standards, however, a video that surfaced of the two brothers mocking CM Punk and WWE scored high on the strange scale.

In the video, filmed at a diner late at night, Jeff Hardy went off on a largely incoherent rant against Punk, calling him a "nerd" and criticizing Punk for ignoring him backstage over the latter stages of their on-screen feud. He further claimed that Punk owes his success in WWE to their series of matches, but that Punk was ungrateful and disrespectful not only to himself, but other stars.

After questioning whether "The

Straight-Edge Superstar" truly lived up to the drug-free lifestyle he touts, Jeff mocked WWE's TV-PG direction, making an obscene gesture (directed specifically at Punk) at the camera.

The camera then cut briefly to a somewhat more lucid Matt Hardy. The elder Hardy brother briefly stopped eating from a plate of french fries to mention his former girlfriend, Amy "Lita" Dumas, with whom Hardy is now once again on friendly terms.

To many observers, the video portrayed the Hardys (especially Jeff) in a far worse public light than Punk. With Jeff Hardy still facing criminal charges and increasingly under the microscope for his on-camera and off-camera behavior while defending the TNA World championship, the timing of the video's release was anything but favorable to the two men who appeared in it.



Photo by George Napolitano

QUOTES OF THE MONTH



"People have asked me if I would want to get in the ring with The Undertaker. I'd do it in a New York minute, but that's not really up to me right now."

—Bill Goldberg, via Twitter, on ongoing rumors that he might return to WWE and pursue a feud with The Undertaker

"I wonder if I backstab a bunch of people and hurt careers & families and slaughter animals for fun [by sport hunting] but then pray on stage, if that makes it okay? Just wondering?"

—Gregory "Hurricane" Helms, reiterating earlier disparaging comments about retired star Shawn Michaels, via Twitter

"Verbal attack? Wow, pretty scary. Thoughts? Sticks and stones, I guess."

—Shawn Michaels, responding to Helms' verbal assault, via Twitter

"I personally think that their story has not evolved enough yet. There's a real human interest story about their childhoods and growing up with wrestling that doesn't need to be rushed. I wouldn't be surprised, though, if the timing is a little quick and I don't have any idea if this rift they have right now is going to be a permanent rift or if it will lead to a huge storyline. Who knows? Maybe it will tie me in somehow."

—Bret Hart, discussing the dissension between David Hart Smith and Tyson Kidd

"My body tells me when I can and can't withstand an injury. I have a pretty good pain threshold most of the



WINNERS AND LOSERS

WINNERS

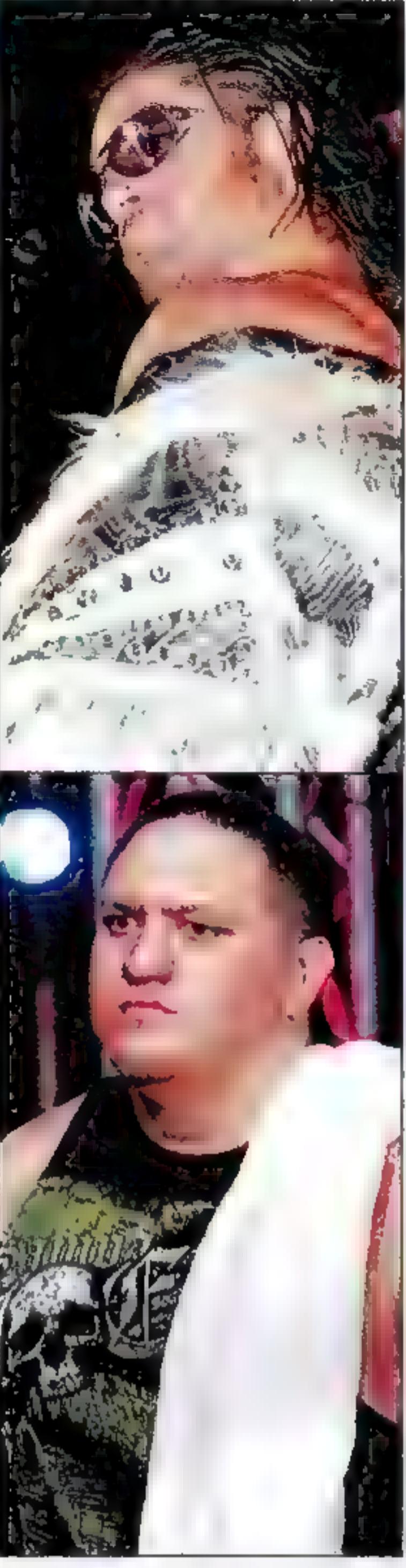
JEFF HARDY: Remains atop TNA despite controversies in and out of ring

JOHN MORRISON: Decisive win over Sheamus at Survivor Series

JEFF JARRETT: Re-enters top tier of TNA active roster

DANIEL BRYAN: Reeled off impressive string of U.S. title defenses

KOFI KINGSTON: Earned kudos from peers despite losses to Jack Swagger



time. Living straight edge, I might not be able to wrestle as long [with a severe injury] as some other guys, but in terms of staying healthy for the long term, this way is better off."

—CM Punk, explaining his decision to take time off from the ring while rehabbing a torn hip tendon and work behind the Raw broadcast desk, *Baltimore Sun*

"With this anti-bullying campaign we're doing and coming off an award for reasonableness I was given by Jon Stewart, it just didn't seem right. To be hitting people with my reasonableness award on TV would be funny. I could have done a couple of weeks of good television. But in the bigger picture—and I think TNA has got to start looking at the bigger picture more often—I could be a lot more effective as somebody who goes out there and talks about serious issues."

—Mick Foley on why he nixed a proposed TNA storyline that would involve him turning heel, *SunSport WrestleCast*

LOSERS

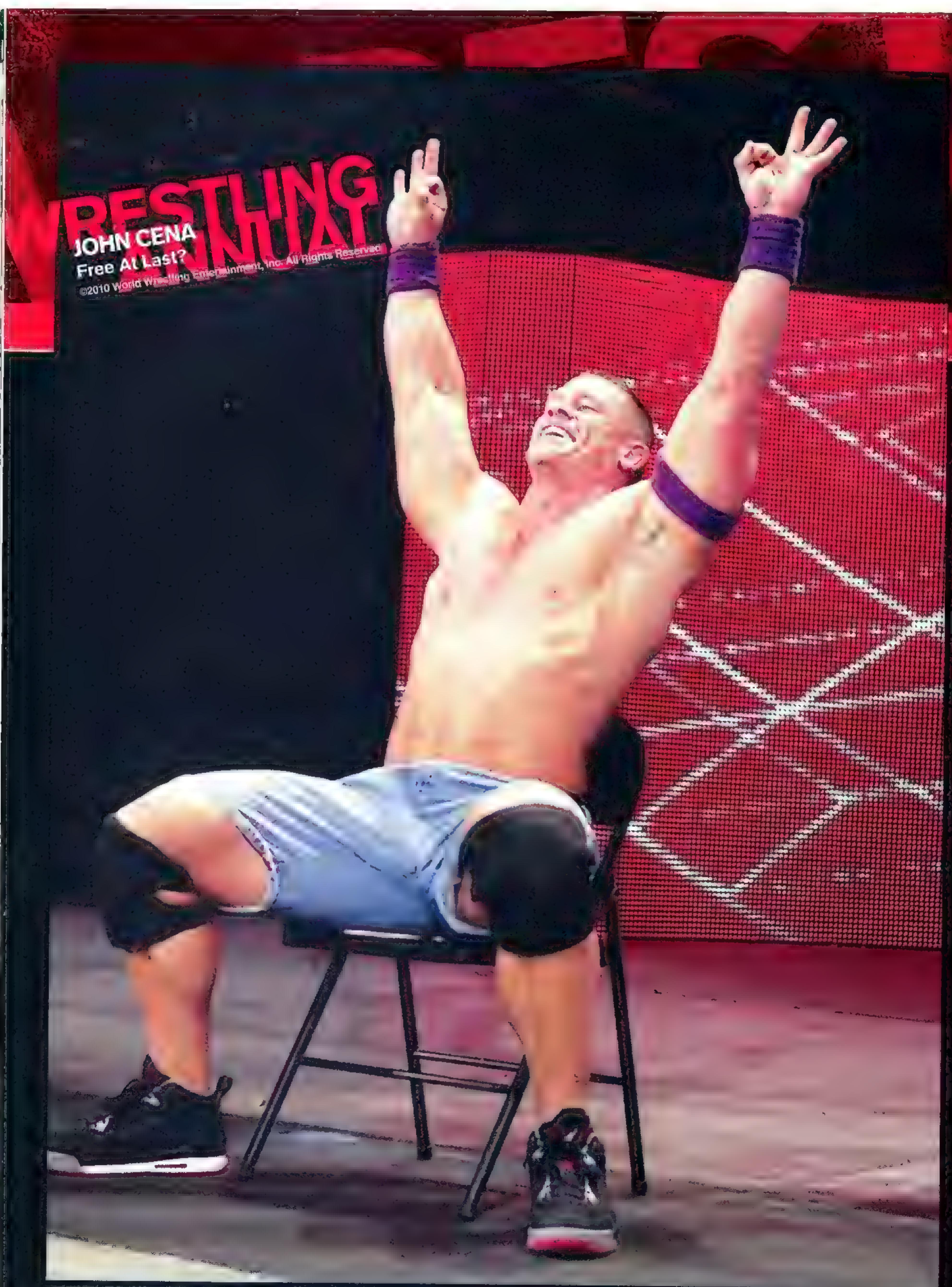
JOHN CENA: Put in a no-win situation by Wade Barrett

THE NEXUS: Showed disintegration of group was inevitable

D'ANGELO DINERO: Continued to lose momentum gained during hot summer

SAMOA JOE: "Samoan Submission Machine" appeared in need of refurbishing

AJ STYLES: Lost cleanly to a departing Raven in latter's TNA swan song



WRESTLING IN DECEMBER

COMING UP: **Al Aiven**

FOR BETTER OR worse, all things must eventually come to an end. In wrestling, as in life, the end of one chapter signifies the beginning of the next.

For example, John Cena thought that he had destroyed The Nexus once and for all when he vanquished Wade Barrett. However, he may have actually unleashed something far worse, unwittingly helping the faction evolve.

Speaking of evolving, Edge, Santino Marella, Vladimir Kozlov, and Doug Williams continued to do just that, scoring title wins that bolstered their individual careers and setting the pace for the competition in 2011.

John Morrison and Sheamus set a new standard, roaring out amongst the highly competitive pack of young lions gunning for a WWE world championship.

Likewise, a women's match of nearly unrivaled caliber and physicality between Mickie James and Tara raised the bar for the entire Knockouts division in TNA, which was a big win for women's wrestling in general.

Roderick Strong and El Generico blazed separate but equally poignant paths at Ring of Honor's Final Battle. The roads to redemption and revenge have been trod, but do they truly end there?

Meanwhile, MVP and Kaval saw their respective WWE journeys come to an end, at least for now. Where they make their marks next remains to be seen, as do the ramifications of their departures.

On the other end of the wrestling spectrum, Hulk Hogan found the relief from pain that he has long sought. (Then again, he got married—does that

cancel things out?) And indy standout Nick Gage must now face the consequences of his desperate, dangerous, and regrettable actions.

BARRETT OUT/PUNK IN AS NEXUS' LEADER

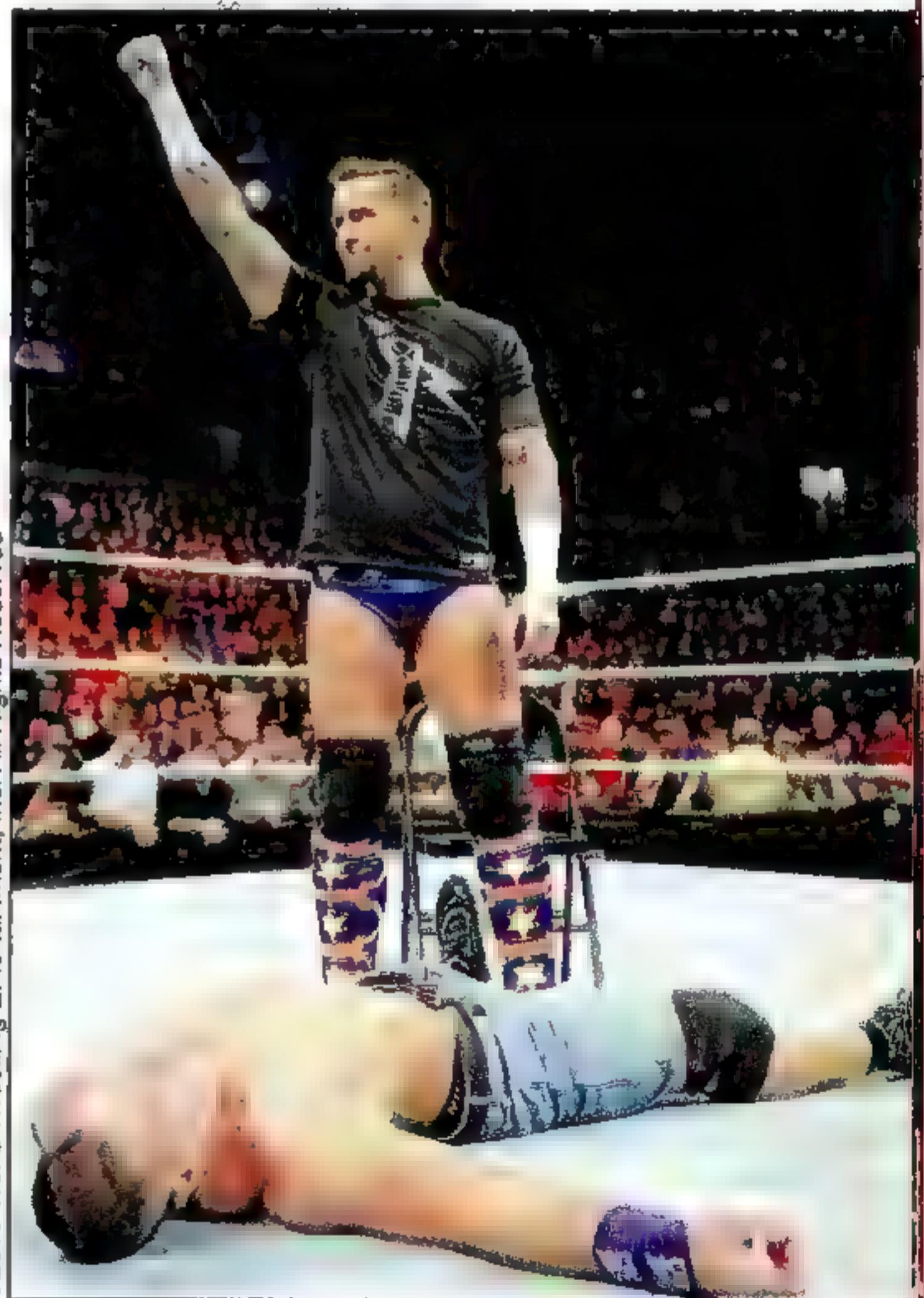
After months of feuding, the culmination of the war between John Cena and The Nexus came down to the industry's biggest star battling Wade Barrett in a chairs match at TLC.

Cena was reinstated by Barrett at the behest of the other members of The Nexus, who had quickly grown tired of being attacked by the "fired" Cena. Now Barrett sought to take out his rival for good, while Cena looked for revenge against a man who had caused him tremendous pain and frustration.

Both men made brutal use of the stipulation—Cena rolling Barrett down the ramp into a set of steel steps, Barrett wrapping a chair around Cena's neck and ramming him into a ringpost. But it was the final image of the PPV broadcast that will forever be remembered.

After finishing Barrett off with an Attitude Adjustment onto a set of chairs, Cena placed his rival on a dolly and sent a cascading set of chairs that were suspended above the ramp (as part of the stage design) crashing down on his rival. There was no sight of Nexus the

A Punk at the helm of The Nexus ... how appropriate!



WITH CENA LYING IN THE RING, NEXUS CLEARED OUT, ALLOWING PUNK TO ENTER AND HIT HIS GO TO SLEEP FINISHER ON CENA.

following night on *Raw*, leaving many to wonder if the faction was done, or whether it might return in some other form.

Meanwhile, CM Punk—still a member of the *Raw* broadcast team while rehabbing an injury—made it known that there was a member of the locker-room who had “wronged” him, someone he would target upon his return.

It didn’t take long for Punk to seek out Cena, attacking him with a steel chair on episodes of *Raw* and *Smackdown*. Punk claimed that Cena was nothing more than a bully and that he would take him down.

A week after declaring his intentions, Punk promised to call Cena out. But before he could, The Nexus returned—sans Barrett—and carried out another vicious attack on Cena. With Cena lying in the ring, Nexus cleared out, allowing Punk to enter and hit his Go To Sleep finisher on Cena.

Punk then slipped on a Nexus arm-band and turned to gesture to the rest of the faction, signaling himself as its new leader.

EDGE WINS 10TH WORLD TITLE AT TLC

Was it fate or coincidence that shined on Edge after his controversial double-pinfall finish with World champion Kane at Survivor Series?

With the veteran in line for another shot at the title, the next pay-per-view on WWE’s schedule just so happened to be TLC, an event that showcases a variety of gimmick-match concepts that Edge has a history of dominating.

It didn’t seem to bother Edge that he would have to share the opportunity with Rey Mysterio Jr. and Alberto Del Rio—the two other top challengers on *Smackdown*—in a four-way TLC showdown. The multiple-man environment would allow the Toronto native to further frustrate Kane, after abducting Paul Bearer.

Indeed, mind games were

Edge gave it all he had—and it was worth it

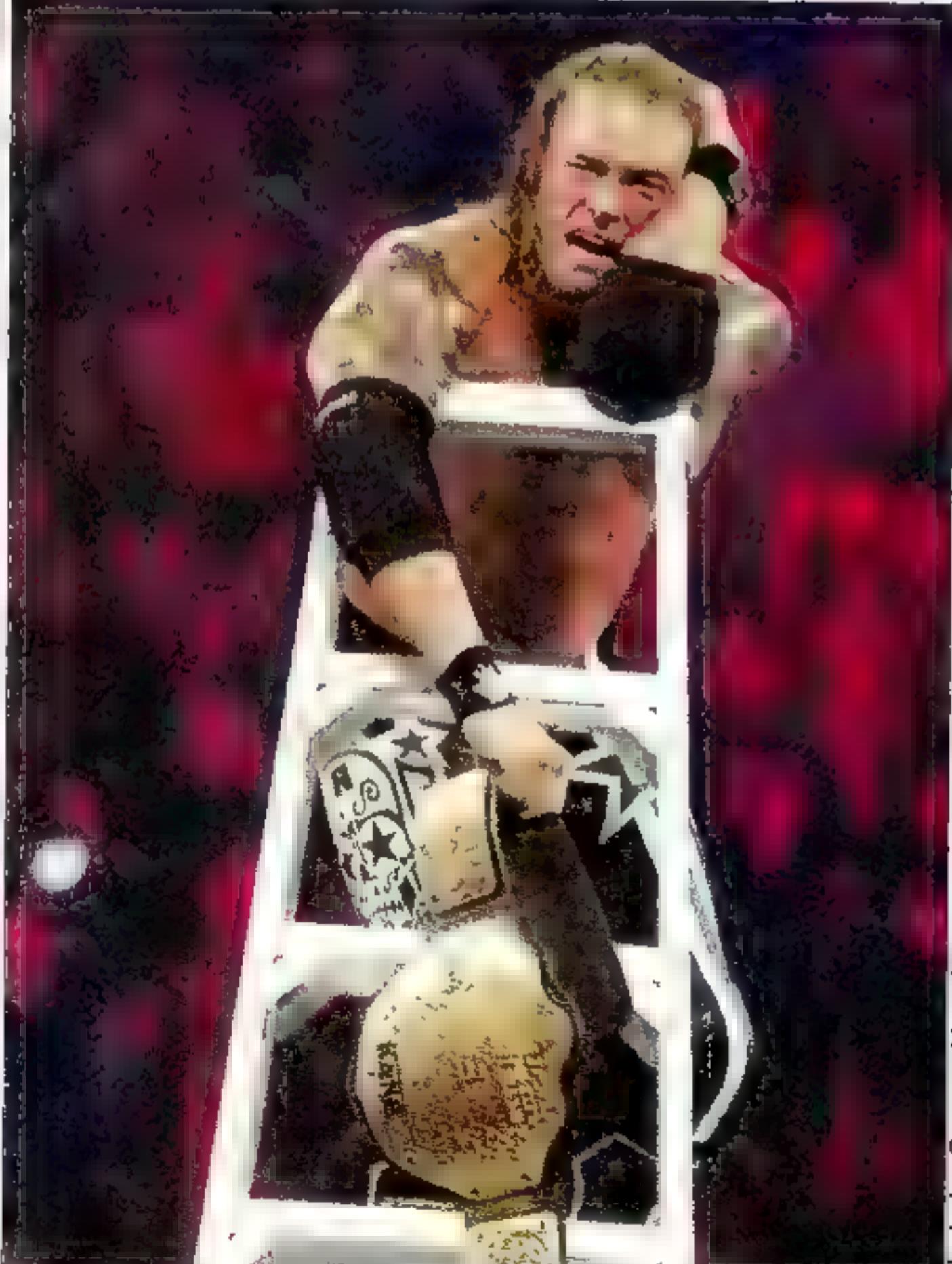


Photo by George Napolitano

being played to the max when all four men stepped into the ring to compete in one of the industry’s most dangerous matches at the Toyota Center in Houston, Texas.

Each wrestler endured his share of punishment—including Edge, who, as expected, was Kane’s primary target throughout. However, Kane may have been overconfident that he had put away Edge after he chokeslammed him through a table at ringside.

Mysterio took out Del Rio by dumping him off the ladder, sending the aristocratic Mexican crashing through numerous tables outside the ring. However, the popular Mysterio soon fell victim to Kane’s devastating Tombstone piledriver.

Unbeknownst to Kane, Edge had recovered by this point. He speared the champion off of the apron and through a table, then climbed the ladder to easily recover the belt.

In the process, Edge scored a record-setting sixth WWE World title reign and his 10th world title win overall.

SANTINO & KOZLOV WIN WWE TAG TITLE

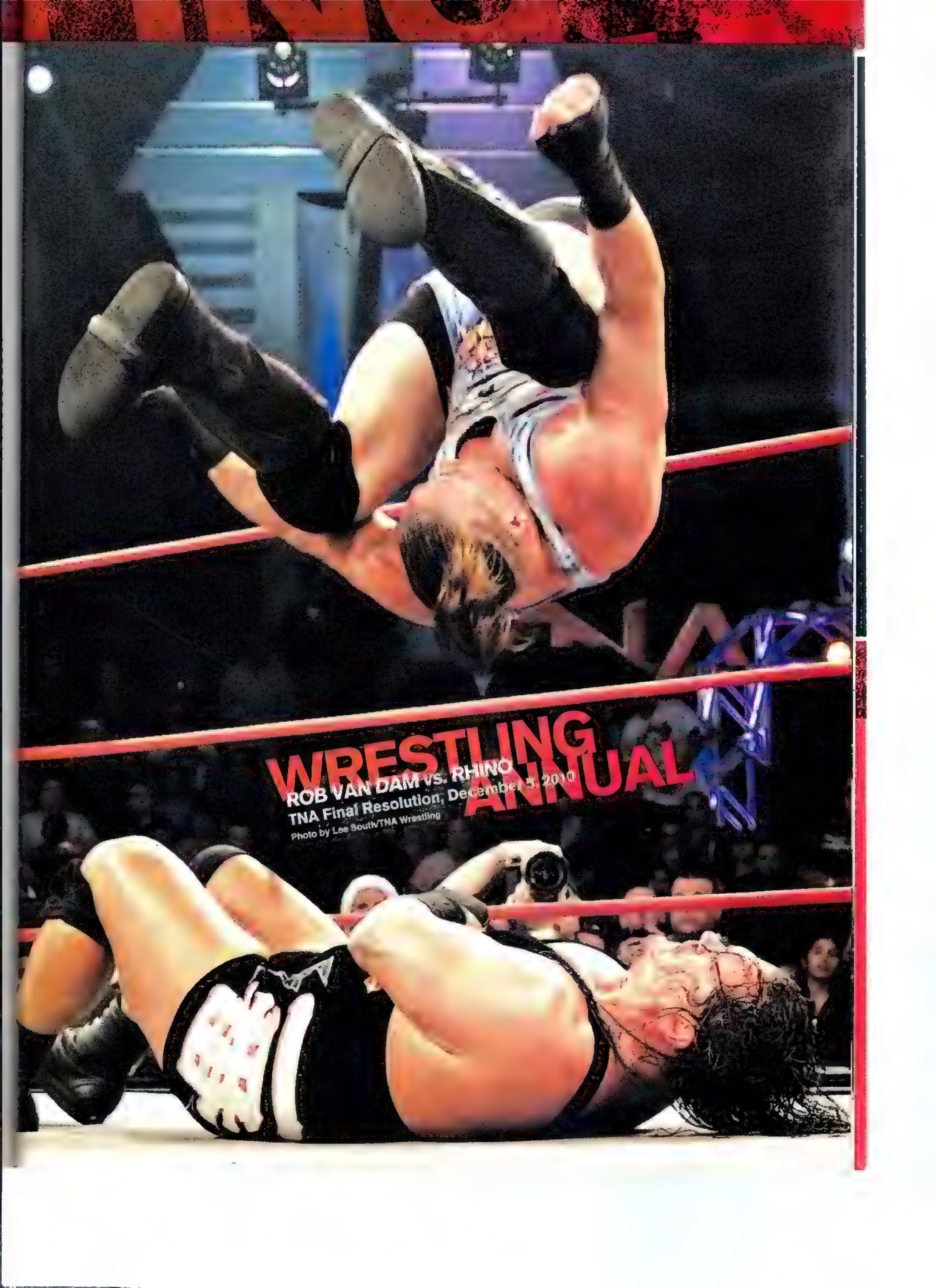
Few duos have ever exhibited a zanier dynamic than Santino and Kozlov have in WWE. And, in a company where mismatched tag teams and off-the-wall characters have long been the norm, that is truly saying something.

Since becoming an official team months prior, Santino and Kozlov had been known primarily for their backstage comedy skits and general buffoonery. Fans always seem to enjoy the antics of the clownish Santino and his straight-laced Russian comrade.

But serious contenders to the tag team title? That seemed far-fetched, even as the team swam in a drastically watered-down pool of challengers.

At Survivor Series, Santino and Kozlov had affirmed what just about everyone already believed—that they had no chance of toppling the Nexus team of Heath Slater and Justin Gabriel for the straps.

Two weeks later, however, they got another chance on *Raw*, and pulled off the huge upset ... albeit with a little help from John Cena.



WRESTLING ANNUAL

ROB VAN DAM VS. RHINO

TNA Final Resolution, December 10, 2000

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



Photo by George Mapolana

Nothing funny about that championship gold

Cena, who had been fired from WWE by Wade Barrett at Survivor Series, showed up toward the end of a Fatal 4-Way title match that involved these two teams, along with the Usos and the tandem of Mark Henry and Yoshi Tatsu.

The Nexus had firmly been in control, but the distraction allowed Santino to recover while Gabriel was fixated on Cena at ringside. Upon turning around, Gabriel fell victim to Santino's unorthodox Cobra Strike finisher, and, to the surprise of the fans, new tag champs were crowned.

In the midst of the celebration that followed, Tamina, a former associate of the Usos, kissed Santino. Not a bad start to a reign few had seen coming.

DOUGLAS WILLIAMS BEATS AJ STYLES FOR TV TITLE

Douglas Williams had been no stranger to winning titles in TNA, having previously enjoyed reigns as X division champion and as one-half of the company's tag team champions.

But a win over one of TNA's top stars in TV champion AJ Styles would not only add another prestigious trophy to his mantel, it could catapult him toward main-event status.

Mere weeks before they squared off at Final Resolution, Williams and Styles had been Fortune stablemates. But friction had been brewing between Williams and the others—including leader Ric Flair, Kazarian, Robert Roode, and James Storm—for some time.

The final straw came when Williams

refused to take part in an attack on exiled Fortune member Matt Morgan. After being confronted by Styles, the Englishman helped Morgan clean house, endearing himself to the fans for the first time in TNA.

This set up a showdown at the company's final pay-per-view of the year, a match that would see the Impact Zone faithful squarely in Williams' corner.

The contest featured 15 minutes of intense, fast-paced action. Despite their obvious dislike for each other, both men resisted the temptation to brawl, turning in a technical clinic suitable to their respective styles.

The key point of the match came when Williams managed to escape Styles' version of the figure-four leglock by rolling over repeatedly to turn the momentum of the hold. In a stunning development, Williams managed to capture Styles in his own signature hold—the Styles Clash—to score a clean pinfall victory and capture the title.

Proving the win was not a fluke, Williams would battle Styles to a 1-1 draw in an Iron Man match a few weeks later on *Impact*.



Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

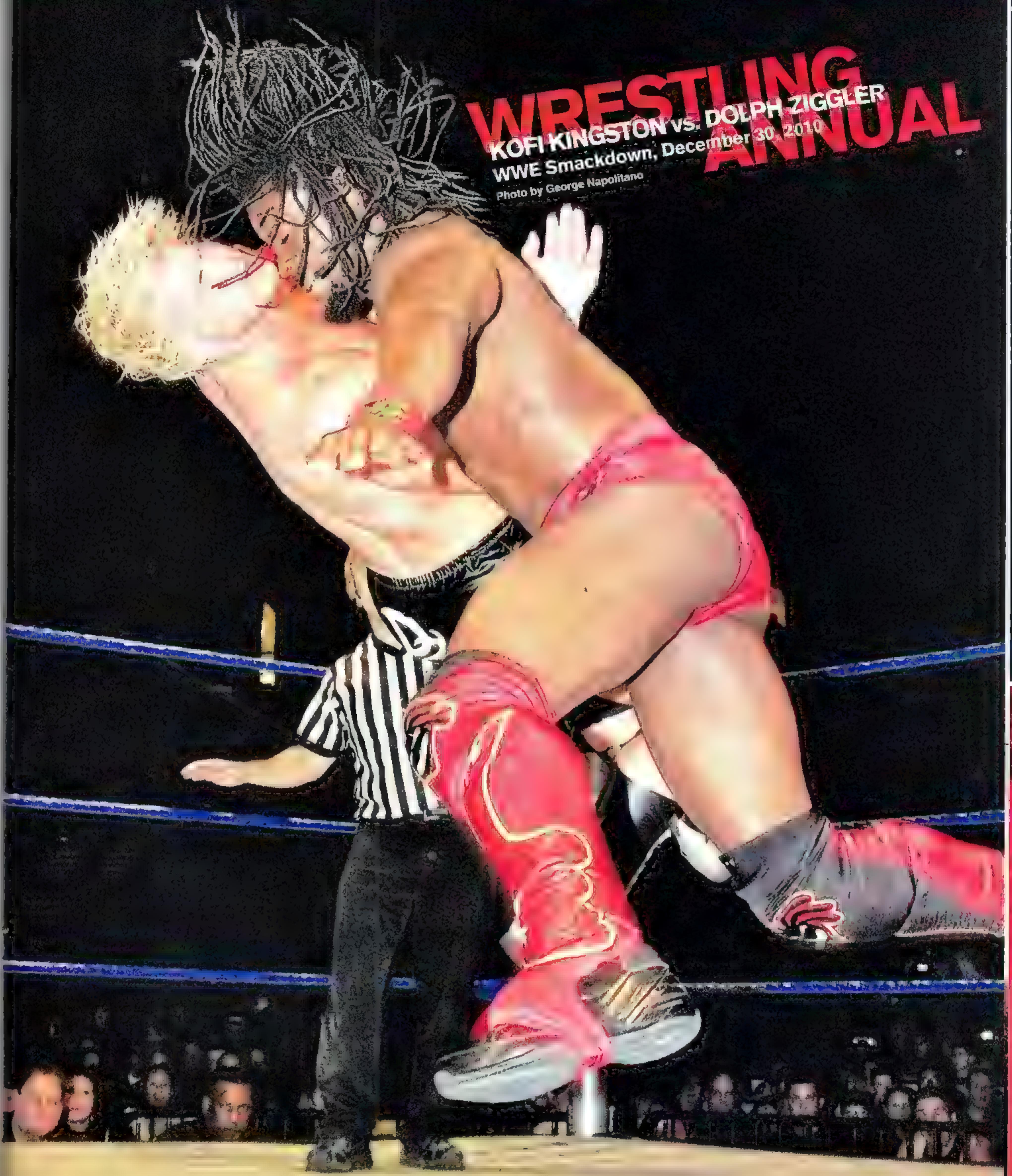
IN A STUNNING DEVELOPMENT, WILLIAMS MANAGED TO CAPTURE STYLES IN HIS OWN SIGNATURE HOLD—THE STYLES CLASH—TO SCORE A CLEAN PINFALL VICTORY AND CAPTURE THE TITLE.

WRESTLING

KOFI KINGSTON vs. DOLPH ZIGGLER

WWE Smackdown, December 30, 2010

Photo by George Napolitano



AS ONE OF THE MOST VIOLENT MATCHES IN THE COMPANY'S HISTORY DREW TO A CLOSE, STEEN BEGGED GENERICO FOR MERCY. STEEN OFFERED UP GENERICO'S OLD MASK, WHICH HE HAD PREVIOUSLY STOLEN, BUT GENERICO PASTED HIS RIVAL OVER THE HEAD WITH A STEEL CHAIR ANYWAY, ENDING THIS LONG FEUD AND DRIVING STEEN FROM ROH IN THE PROCESS.

STRONG, GENERICO TRIUMPHANT AT FINAL BATTLE

For ROH champion Roderick Strong, his Final Battle defense against the popular—and heavily favored—Davey Richards was a chance at vindication. For El Generico, the event represented a chance to gain revenge against his former best friend and now bitter enemy, Kevin Steen.

Both men would make the best of their respective opportunities, and then some.

Since defeating the outgoing Tyler Black for the ROH title at Glory by Honor IX in September, Strong had been hounded by the question of whether or not he could defeat former tag team partner Richards.

For many, Richards was considered not only the best independent wrestler in the world, but the uncrowned ROH champion. Buildup for the highly anticipated match was intense, and the combatants did not disappoint when the bell finally rang at the Manhattan Center in New York City.

For more than 30 minutes, both men punched, kicked, and chopped each other into near oblivion. At one point, Strong actually tapped out to Richards' anklelock, but the referee didn't see it thanks to interference from Strong's manager, Truth Martini.

Eventually, after both men had managed kick-out after kick-out, the referee stopped the match with Richards trapped in the champion's Strong Hold (an elevated Boston crab, with a knee in the back).

Next up was the long-awaited Fight Without Honor between Generico and Steen. Steen had spent the better part of 2010 playing mind games with his one-time best friend, brutally attacking him on numerous occasions with the help of Steve Corino.

It took Generico months to get his hands on Steen, but to do so, he had to put his cherished mask on the line. Steen agreed to put his ROH career on the line.

As one of the most violent matches in the company's history drew to a close, Steen begged Generico for

mercy. Steen offered up Generico's old mask, which he had previously stolen, but Generico pasted his rival over the head with a steel chair anyway, ending this long feud and driving Steen from ROH in the process.

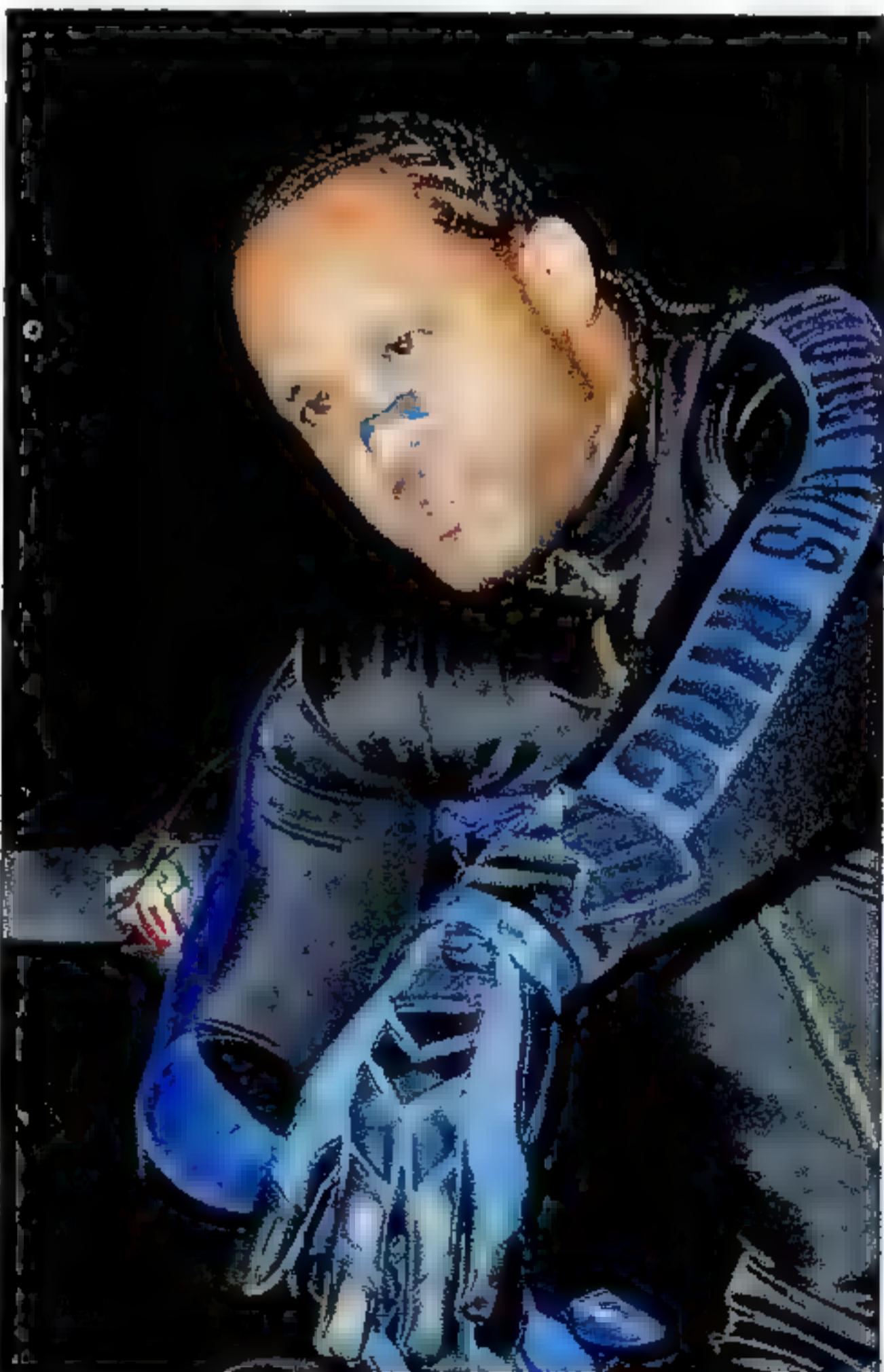
MVP, KAVAL RELEASED FROM WWE CONTRACTS

After recently bidding farewell to little-used talents such as Luke Gallows, Shad Gaspard, Vance Archer, and Caylen Croft, it was not surprising that WWE would perform another round of cuts in December.

What caught everyone by surprise were the names and reasoning behind the terminations, as both MVP and Kaval asked for—and were granted—their releases.

MVP had been with WWE since late-2006 and was generally considered to be one of the company's most steady performers. Reportedly, the 37-year-old Miami native had been unhappy with his mid-card role and was unwilling to wait for Creative to come up with something new for him.

In a Twitter post after his release, MVP stated that he "felt it was time to go international and freshen things up,"



MVP's had enough of WWE for now

Photo by George Napolitano

fueling speculation that he might seek to compete in Japan or Europe.

During his four-year stint with WWE, MVP enjoyed one tag team title reign (with Matt Hardy) and two U.S. championship stints for a combined 419 days.

Kaval had been with WWE for only a brief time, having debuted as a rookie contestant on *NXT* Season Two back in June. He went on to win the competition, but did not make much of a splash after subsequently joining the *Smackdown* roster.

The dynamic Brooklyn native did score a big non-title victory over Dolph Ziggler, but failed in an opportunity to win the belt at *Survivor Series*. On the December 21 edition of *Smackdown*, Kaval was attacked before the bell and soundly defeated in seconds by Drew McIntyre.

Two days later, it was announced that he was gone from the company. As with MVP, Kaval, who is actually an accomplished 12-year veteran (wrestling primarily as Lo Ki), seemed to be upset with his position on the card, but many observers immediately noted that he may not have stuck around long enough to give his WWE career a chance.

HULK HOGAN UNDERGOES MAJOR BACK SURGERY

In late-November, Dixie Carter announced on an episode of *Reaction* that Hulk Hogan had been indefinitely suspended from TNA for abuse of signatory authority in his role as co-leader of the Immortal stable with Eric Bischoff.

During his time away, the legendary "Hulkster" planned to undergo spinal fusion surgery. Though his in-ring days were likely over by this point, the procedure would all but guarantee that the 57-year-old legend would never wrestle again.

Hogan had been experiencing debilitating back pain for some time, the result of years of wear and tear on his bulked-up frame.

After checking into a Tampa area hospital, he underwent a grueling 10-hour procedure that consisted of fusion, rebuilding, and restructuring of his spine.

This was the 10th back surgery for Hogan over the past several years, and

the most successful. Within a few days, the former WWF and WCW world champion was said to be resting and recovering well, though no timetable was given for his return to TNA, or any other projects for that matter.

The surgery was part of a very eventful month in the seemingly always-eventful life of wrestling's all-time biggest name. Approximately a week prior, Hogan married girlfriend Jennifer McDaniel in a ceremony outside of their Clearwater home. That event made headlines for an entirely different reason, with a major scuffle breaking out between Hogan's security guards and paparazzi.

On New Year's Eve, Hogan's mother, Ruth Bollea, died at age 88.

WWE PRESENTS FIRST STATESIDE **TRIBUTE TO THE TROOPS**

As hard as it may be to believe, WWE hosted its eighth annual *Tribute To The Troops* show in December. This marked the first time the event had been held in the United States, emanating from Fort Hood, Texas.

The previous seven versions had been held on military bases in either Iraq or Afghanistan.

The card featured five matches in all,

THOUGH [HOGAN'S] IN-RING DAYS WERE LIKELY OVER BY THIS POINT, THE PROCEDURE WOULD ALL BUT GUARANTEE THAT THE 57-YEAR-OLD LEGEND WOULD NEVER WRESTLE AGAIN.

A mighty Big Show, Diddy et al





JAMES THEN CHALLENGED TARA TO A STEEL CAGE MATCH, WHICH NOT ONLY TOOK PLACE ON THE NEXT EDITION OF IMPACT, BUT MAIN-EVENTED THE SHOW. BOTH ATHLETES PUT IT ALL ON THE LINE, GOING AT IT IN ONE OF THE MOST VIOLENT WOMEN'S MATCHES EVER SHOWCASED IN NORTH AMERICA.

highlighted by an entertaining six-man tag affair that saw John Cena, Randy Orton, and Rey Mysterio Jr. defeat WWE champion The Miz, Alberto Del Rio, and Wade Barrett.

WWE aired two versions of the show: a 60-minute NBC broadcast on December 18 and a two-hour show two days later on USA. The former featured only the six-man tag and a tag match in which The Big Show and Kofi Kingston beat Intercontinental champion Dolph Ziggler and Jack Swagger.

The full broadcast on USA also included Mark Henry winning a 15-man battle royal (last eliminating Sheamus); R-Truth beating Ted DiBiase Jr.; and Natalya, Kelly Kelly, and the Bella Twins defeating Lay-Cool, Alicia Fox, and Melina.

In a special exhibition, World champion Kane went to a no-contest with Major General Will Grimsley in an arm-wrestling contest, after which Edge attacked Kane.

The show was also, by far, the most celebrity-laden *Tribute To The Troops* yet, featuring appearances and performances by Diddy, Trace Adkins, Cedric the Entertainer, Sherri Shepherd, and Miss USA Rima Fakih. A special, taped message from former President George W. Bush also aired.

Those in attendance were treated to a reunion of DeGeneration-X, with Triple-H and Shawn Michaels appearing live to cap off the show. This was not shown on television, however.

MICKIE JAMES, TARA BATTLE INSIDE A CAGE ON IMPACT

If there was one area where TNA has generally been acknowledged to have an edge over WWE, it is in the quality of its female division. Though TNA's roster was no longer punctuated by the dominating presence of Awesome Kong by late-2010, the additions of former WWE Women's champions Mickie James and Tara (formerly Victoria) had more than filled this absence.

It seemed to be only a matter of time before James and Tara would cross paths after James' debut in October. This was expedited thanks to Tara's association with Knockouts champion

Madison Rayne.

Shortly after attaining number-one contender's status, James dropped a falls-count-anywhere match to Tara at Final Resolution, when Rayne attacked her with a fire extinguisher and the Knockouts title belt.

James then challenged Tara to a steel cage match, which not only took place on the next edition of *Impact*, but main-evented the show. Both athletes put it all on the line, going at it in one of the most violent women's matches ever showcased in North America. ▲

The turning point of the match came when Tara hit her elbow on the ring apron. She subsequently attempted to scale the cage, but couldn't use her arm. James knocked Tara to the mat and climbed the cage herself, but hesitated. Rather than going over, she dove from the top, performing a spectacular Lou Thesz press on Tara for the pinfall. In the aftermath, it was revealed that Tara had suffered a torn ligament in her elbow.

The injury would not require surgery, but underscored the dangerous nature of the match. That this grudge encounter was so prominently featured on TNA's weekly broadcast also reaffirmed the company's faith in the Knockouts division.

NICK GAGE TURNS SELF IN AFTER BANK ROBBERY

On December 30, New Jersey authorities announced that they were seeking popular hardcore wrestler Nick Gage for allegedly robbing a PNC Bank in Collingswood, New Jersey, eight days earlier.

A report stated that Gage, 30, had handed a note to a teller, claiming he would shoot her if she didn't hand over the money. He made off with \$3,000 in cash.

Bail was set at \$150,000. Police released Gage's photo in hopes that the public—and perhaps local wrestling fans—would be able to confirm his identity and shed light on his whereabouts.

Combat Zone Wrestling, long considered Gage's home promotion, released a statement on its official website that read: "Combat Zone Wres-



Photo by Joe Zanolle

Gage may end up in a cage

ting, LLC, has no direct knowledge of any alleged wrongdoings by Nick Gage. We firmly discourage any fans from emulating any of the actions alleged. We also hope that if these accusations are true that Nick will turn himself over to authorities."

The following day, Gage turned himself in and was formally charged with robbery—but not before the story got national attention after being picked up by the Associated Press, giving the industry yet another black eye before the calendar flipped over to 2011.

If convicted, Gage faces a possible punishment of 5 to 15 years in prison. Thus, his wrestling career has been placed in serious jeopardy. CZW owner DJ Hyde did go on record as saying that Gage would be welcomed back after serving his time.

An 11-year vet, Gage became the first CZW heavyweight champion in 1999. He would go on to become the promotion's only Grand Slam champion, competing on almost every one of its shows while establishing a reputation as one of the most reviled hardcore/death match wrestlers on the independent scene.

IN OTHER NEWS ...

TNA World champion Jeff Hardy defeated Matt Morgan at Final Resolution, with Mr. Anderson serving as guest referee ... Awesome Kong entered into negotiations with WWE ... Samoa Joe agreed to terms with TNA on a new contract ... Shelton Benjamin and Charlie Haas announced that they had signed full-time deals with Ring of Honor ... NXT Season Four kicked off with Florida Championship Wrestling talents Brodus Clay, Bryon Saxton, Conor O'Brian, Derrick Bateman, Johnny Curtis, and Jacob Novak competing ... Taz announced the opening of a new "finishing school" for seasoned wrestlers ... The *Hollywood Reporter* ranked Jerry Lawler slapping Andy Kaufman on *Late Night With David Letterman* the 30th greatest moment in television history ... WWE champion The Miz made appearances on *TMZ* and *Late Night With Jimmy Fallon* ... WWE released a new Goldust book and a DVD chronicling the career of Bobby "The Brain" Heenan ... Former WWWF performer Hans Mortier passed away at 86 ... Former WWWF tag team champion King Curtis Iaukea died at age 73 after a long illness ... The city of Humboldt, Iowa, began a fundraising effort and search for sculptors to build an eight-foot bronze statue of early-20th century wrestler Frank Gotch.

IF CONVICTED, GAGE FACES A POSSIBLE PUNISHMENT OF 5 TO 15 YEARS IN PRISON. HIS WRESTLING CAREER, THUS, HAS BEEN PLACED IN SERIOUS JEOPARDY.



Hardy finds Morgan an inviting target

Photo by Lee Soutar/TNA Wrestling

BUSINESS STORY OF THE MONTH: CENA REACHES MAKE-A-WISH MILESTONE

Say what you will about John Cena. Knock his wrestling ability all you want, torch him for his acting skills, or lament his standing as the poster boy of WWE's kid-oriented, PG-era marketing mentality.

One thing that is all but impossible to deny is that Cena is one of the industry's good guys. But it goes much further than that. The multi-time world champ has gone out of his way over the past few years to not only become an on-screen role model for many, but to back it up through his charitable contributions in real life.

Cena's most notable work has come through his association with the Make-A-Wish Foundation, an organization that grants wishes to children with life-threatening medical conditions. Impressively, Cena has gone about this most quietly over the years, refusing to draw attention to himself.

In December, however, the depth of his contributions was recognized when WWE announced that Cena had surpassed an incredible record, granting the wishes of more than 200 children.

Cena reached the milestone in just six years, joining NASCAR drivers Jeff Gordon and Dale Earnhardt Jr. and Hulk Hogan as celebrity wish-granters who have fulfilled 200 wishes.

Amid the negative press that often permeates the business, Cena's accomplishment brought much-welcomed positive press for WWE. Cena granted his 200th wish on

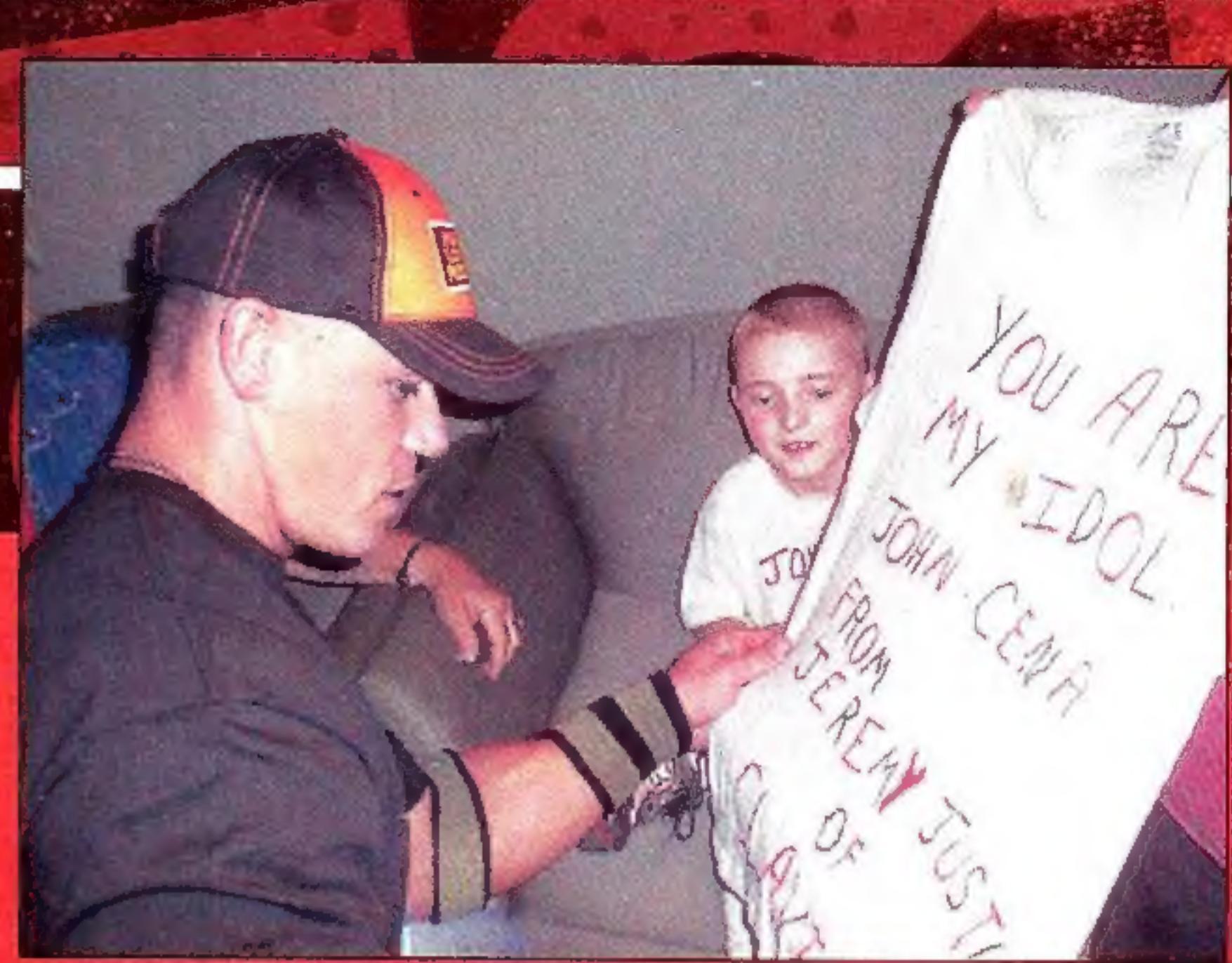


Photo by Vanessa Covello

CBS's *The Talk* television program on Thursday, December 9, surprising nine-year-old Shayan of Agoura Hills, California, and inviting him to attend *Raw* in New Orleans as part of his wish.

"It's an honor to be recognized by the Make-A-Wish Foundation, but this isn't about me. It's about giving kids a chance to smile again and receive attention for something other than their medical condition," Cena said. "They just want to be treated like normal kids, and anytime I can help them enjoy their moment and feel hope, I'll be there."

"What stands out about John is his enthusiasm for meeting kids virtually anytime, anywhere," said David Williams, Make-A-Wish Foundation of America president and chief executive officer. "It's really a testament to his desire to make every wish experience unique for the kids, to bring them the joy they deserve and to make them feel like they're the superstar."

"We thank John for his remarkable dedication to our mission and look forward to him granting many, many more wishes."

WRESTLER OF THE MONTH: EDGE

It seems that Edge always has a plan. Never is the "Rated R Superstar" out of contention, even when it appears he has fallen from main-event status.

While we'll never know for sure if the blowup that ended in his destruction of the Raw GM's laptop and subsequent trade to Smackdown was part of some master scheme to regain the World title, it's a darned good bet. (Edge's computer abuse also earned him a Slammy Award for the Oh Snap Meltdown of the Year, for what it's worth.)

Upon his return to Friday nights, Edge attempted to leverage his popularity into an immediate feud with the brand's titleholder, Kane. After failing to immediately gain the "Big Red Machine's" attention, Edge wasn't about to sit idle.

He put into motion a devious plot, one that surely would have drawn scorn from the fans had the target been anyone other than Kane. In this case, however, kidnapping Kane's father and using him as bait to lure the champion only seemed to further endear Edge to the WWE Universe.



Photo by George Napolitano

After failing to win the title in a one-on-one match against Kane at Survivor Series, Edge positioned himself for a rematch. That the opportunity would come at TLC played right into the "Ultimate Opportunist's" hands.

Taking advantage of the tables, ladders, and chairs stipulations—a specialty throughout his career—Edge out-classed Kane, Rey Mysterio Jr., and Alberto Del Rio in a four-way match to once again capture the World title.

Every time we count him out, Edge seems to climb that ladder again ... literally and figuratively.

MATCH OF THE MONTH: JOHN MORRISON vs. SHEAMUS

Aside from the intrigue of the number-one contender's stipulation that hung in the balance, the ladder match between John Morrison and Sheamus at TLC figured to showcase two of WWE's hottest young stars in the midst of a burgeoning rivalry.

The feud was not remotely of the manufactured variety, but rather one grown organically out of competition, general dislike, and eventually hate. Toss in the high-stakes reward of a future shot at a WWE championship, and all of the ingredients for a classic were there.

Just weeks before the PPV, Sheamus had defeated Morrison in the finals of the 2010 King of the Ring tournament on *Raw*, taking advantage of a second-round bye, while the popular "Shaman Of Sexy" had to wrestle three times in one night. Still, Morrison nearly pulled it off, and he was looking to repay the "Celtic Warrior" on this night.

This one was all action from the opening bell, with Sheamus looking to overpower and brutalize his opponent and Morrison using his creativity and daring to gain an advantage.

For a while, it looked as if Sheamus' strategy of taking out Morrison's legs would pay off. Not only did this neutralize Morrison's offense and limit his aerial and kick-thrusting power, it limited his ability to climb the ladder and retrieve the contract.

As the battle raged, Morrison attempted to climb, but Sheamus knocked him off the ladder. They traded blows on the ring apron, then back up top, where Morrison tossed Sheamus through the ladder and crashed to the floor with him.

Back in, Morrison yet again tried to ascend, but Sheamus kept coming. As Morrison reached for the contract, Sheamus tried to dump the ladder, but Morrison bounded off the ropes, kicked Sheamus, and, finally retrieved the prize while still on the ladder.

It was yet another in a growing list of amazing athletic feats by Morrison, whose victory was greeted with a thunderous reaction from the fans.

Both men pushed each other to their limits, and in doing so, further elevated their rivalry to the forefront of those deserving to be showcased on *Raw*.



Photo by George Napolitano

ODDBALL STORY OF THE MONTH: HARDY, HOGAN—TNA'S NOT-SO-MODEL CITIZENS

Where Jeff Hardy and Hulk Hogan go, controversy is sure to follow. The exploits of two of TNA's biggest—and most important—names reached new levels of absurdity in December, garnering a fairly good amount of negative press for the company.

Eric Bischoff may remain adamant that "controversy creates cash," but there also comes a point where absurdity simply overrides the value of exposure that can come from these situations.

Hardy made headlines before the Final Resolution PPV got underway, when reports surfaced that he had shown up at the Impact Zone in no condition to defend his TNA World title against Matt Morgan in the show's main event.

According to numerous accounts, Hardy was walking around backstage in an incoherent daze before the show, and TNA officials seriously considered sending him home and subsequently stripping him of the TNA title.

As it turned out, Hardy was fit enough to compete against Morgan, whom he defeated to retain the belt. Afterward, he insisted that the earlier reports were untrue,

as did anyone with TNA willing to be quoted on the matter. But lingering doubts about the whole thing persisted. Hardy wrestled competently enough, but turned in a far from stellar performance.

By the end of the month, the self-proclaimed "Antichrist Of Pro Wrestling" was again in the mainstream news, as it was reported that he would be pleading guilty to one or more of the drug charges he faced, in early-2011, according to the Moore County (North Carolina) Prosecutor's office.

Hogan, meanwhile, figured to have a less notable month, as he was laying low in preparation for back surgery. Then came the news that he and fiancée Jennifer McDaniel had decided to get married at his Clearwater home, and somehow or another, all you-know-what managed to break loose and land the "Hulkster" right back on the front page of *TMZ*. Apparently, while Hogan and McDaniel were exchanging their nuptials, Hogan's security got into a scuffle with a paparazzo whom they felt got too close to the action.

(continued on next page)

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The photog—Robert Martinez—reportedly put his forearm on the throat of Hogan family friend Ron Howard (not that Ron Howard) and yelled, "I'm packing a gun!"

Clearwater police were called to break up the brawl, but no arrests were made. Just another day in the life of the "Hulkster," and just another justifiable chance for detractors of TNA to roll their eyes at the proceedings.

QUOTES OF THE MONTH

"I had a rather stern appearance, yeah. I'm pretty near-sighted, so when I take off my glasses, I scowl and maybe sneer naturally because I can't see. I tried to augment that a bit. People react to a big, bald guy a certain way."

—Baron Von Raschke, on cultivating his character and appearance during the early-1970s, "Q&A," *THE WRESTLER/INSIDE WRESTLING*, Volume 37, 2011

"My point was, don't judge me based on my won-loss record and performance on *NXT*, which quite frankly, sucked. I knew I was capable of doing a lot better, because I'd done so before and knew I could do it again."

—Daniel Bryan, on moving beyond his subpar *NXT* stint, "Hotseat," *The Wrestler/Inside Wrestling*, Volume 37, 2011

"Adding fans, adding people to shows. Everyone's like, 'What about regular pay-per-views?' I'd love to be on NBC tomorrow, but it takes growth. It takes building a product that people want to go out of their way to see, that people want to fly cross-country to want to see."

—Ring of Honor producer Dave Lagana, on the company's realistic goals for 2011, *Monday Night Mayhem*

"If TNA doesn't immediately sign Kaval (who won *NXT* based on wwe.com fans' and wrestlers' votes), I've no idea what they look for in wrestlers."

—Joey Styles, tweeting on WWE's release of Kaval, @JoeyStyles

"The evolution of John Morrison continues. As many have pointed out over time and of which I

Photo by Stu Saks



WINNERS AND LOSERS

WINNERS

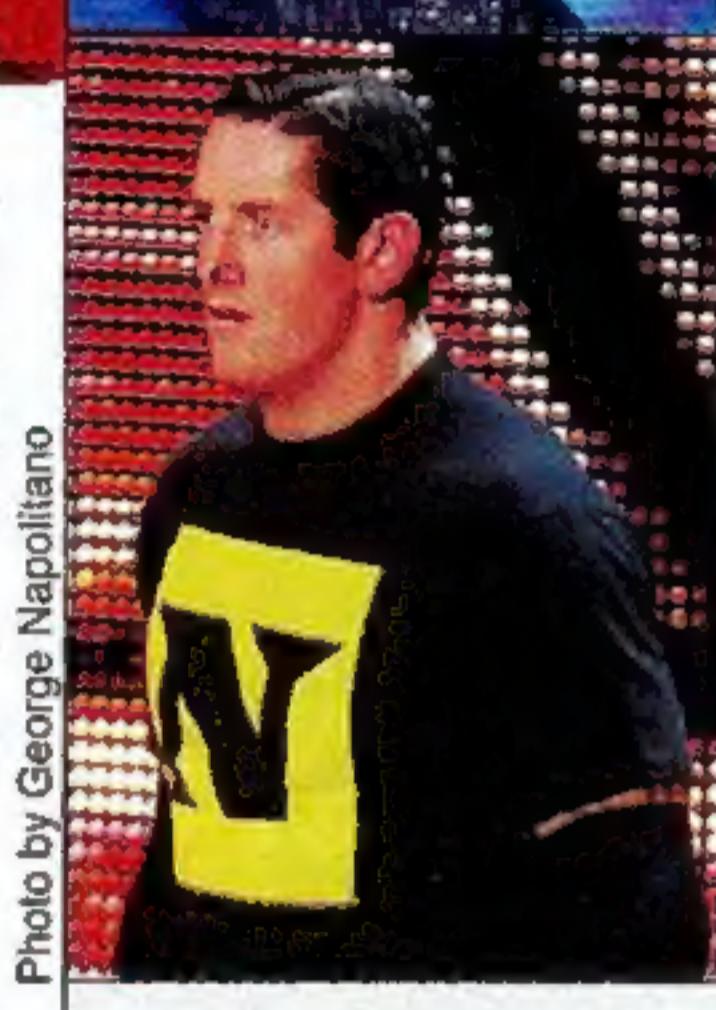
EDGE: Kidnapped yet another world title

JOHN MORRISON: Finally nearing the top rung?

JOHN CENA: Good deeds transcend the sport

RODERICK STRONG: Stands alone atop ROH

DOUG WILLIAMS: Got the nod over AJ



LOSERS

KANE: Got played by Edge

JEFF HARDY: Nearly blew it ... again

NICK GAGE: Actions cannot be justified

WADE BARRETT: Suddenly on the outside

KAVAL: Impatience not a virtue

agree, John has some young HBK tendencies/manerisms but his biggest step, in this fan's eye, is recently demonstrating more physical toughness in the ring."

—Jim Ross, assessing Morrison's evolution in WWE on his blog, jrsbarbecue.com

"I'm the perfect candidate to be a WWE Superstar. However it took me a long, long time to get respect from the WWE Universe, as well as the people in the lockerroom, and I'm still trying to gain even more respect as WWE champion."

—The Miz, talking about overcoming the stigma of being a reality TV star, 411wrestling.com

"No, no ... fans are going to love who they want to love. In my case, I think I've been around wrestling so long that the fans just remember me from WCW and now WWE and they kind of put me in that slot of 'You've been around for quite some time now, Rey.'"

—Rey Mysterio, after being asked if the absences of Shawn Michaels and The Undertaker have placed extra pressure on him as a performer, sport.co.uk

"When I watch it, I have mixed emotions. It's very stirring, sad, but very powerful in its own way. They told a story which vindicated what I did (spitting on Vince McMahon, then later punching him)."

—Bret Hart, commenting on the recently released *Wrestling With Shadows* documentary that chronicles the events surrounding the Montreal Screwjob, *Toronto Sun*

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